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Undergraduate Students' Use of Facebook for Educational Purposes: Advantages, Difficulties, and Potential for Connected Learning

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Facebook is currently the most popular social networking site globally and inevitably getting integrated into different facets of life. The prevalence of Facebook and its profuse affordances (both technical and social) have raised controversial opinions among scholars on applying Facebook to education. In Vietnam, while the number of Facebook users is ranking as the 7th largest worldwide, research on this platform remains remarkably insufficient and mostly limited within social or psychological perspectives. Also, while the country is struggling to improve its long-criticized education system and catch up with global trends of integrating new technologies into learning-teaching contexts, there is a void of understanding on social networking sites, especially Facebook, in relation to education.

The research aims at examining how Facebook is utilized for educational purposes by undergraduate students from Ho Chi Minh University of Education (Vietnam) and their perceptions of applying Facebook to the teaching-learning process, upon which the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook as an educational tool in higher education are clarified. Additionally, through students' actual usage and perceptions, the potential of Facebook for connected learning is discerned in search for feasible solutions to the Vietnamese educational reform. The Theory of Facebook for Educational Usage and Theory of Connected Learning set the theoretical framework for this study.

In the research, the mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative approach was applied to attain optimal understanding. Data were collected from an online semi-structured survey of 394 voluntary undergraduates and five following-up theme-based interviews.

Findings from the research confirmed the three primary usages of Facebook for educational purposes (Mazman & Usluel, 2010) including communication, collaboration, and sharing resources or materials. Besides those assisting functions of Facebook for education, particular problems were detected, namely distraction, ineffective collaboration and communication, information accuracy, and cyber-bullying. Although most students were using Facebook in diverse ways to benefit their studies, a proportion of them held relatively skeptical views on the empowering role of Facebook for education, indicating a gap between students' actual usage and perception. It was also found that Facebook had the potential for promoting connected learning, however, the site still had certain drawbacks that were worth consideration. Based on aforementioned findings, some implications are drawn out for higher education and research.

Keywords: social networking sites, Facebook, higher education, usage, perception, connected learning.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The application of Internet technologies in education can be regarded as one of the fundamental shifts in scholarly realm recently (Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014), in which social media appear as well-known exemplars. There are numerous reasons making them beneficial for education, typically of which are firstly, the wide range of educational affordances offered by social media compared to other technologies; and secondly, the fact that social media are already commonplace among students and teachers, making them more willing and comfortable to further use it in educational settings (Joosten, 2012).

Amid plentiful social media available, this research chooses Facebook social networking site (SNS) as the focal point in recognition of its proliferation and prevalence in current years, especially among young adults. Since being launched in 2004, Facebook has reached around two billion active users by July 2017 as announced by its CEO Mark Zuckerberg, surpassing many other sites to become the most popular network globally. The rapid growth of Facebook has fuelled extensive research on its adoption and consumption in diverse facets from personal to study, working, and social life. Regarding education, particularly in universities where the popularity of Facebook is believed to be most “apparent” and “transforming the ways students communicate, collaborate, and learn” (Tess, 2013, p. 60), the application of Facebook has raised controversial debates.

The distinctive potential of Facebook in education has been affirmed through profuse research worldwide. Its diverse social features have been proved to play an important role in enhancing communication, interaction, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in teaching-learning contexts (Barczyk & Duncan, 2013; Hung & Yuen, 2010; Joosten, 2012). Also, the learning-management-system (LMS)-like functions that Facebook offers are claimed to effectively support learning administration (Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2012) while its multimedia capacity can help enrich academic content and diversify learning activities (Joosten, 2012).

On the other hand, the educational use Facebook has received certain criticism from scholars. Concerns over its application mainly entail distracting users from learning (Cassidy, 2006), the negative correlation with users’ academic performances (Abusbiha & Mustaffa, 2014; Frein, Jones, & Gerow, 2013; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010), and the unreliability of information shared on the

platform (Tang, Yau, Wong, & Wong, 2015). In general, Facebook in relation to education has been widely studied in recent years with ensuing contentious results.

In Vietnam, Facebook is apparently the most popular social network among other SNSs. Surveys conducted by We Are Social – a global media agency – revealed that the number of Facebook users in Vietnam had soared by 40 percent from January 2017 and reached approximately 64 million users (over the population of around 95.6 million people) by July 2017. This figure accounted for 3% of the total Facebook population worldwide, making Vietnam the 7th country of the largest Facebook community (Phuong, 2017). These findings appear as sound evidence for the Vietnamese strong preference for Facebook as well as the impressive expansion of this platform throughout the country. Notably, statistics released in January 2017 showed that young adults (of 18-24 age group) and adults (of 25-34 age group) constituted a significant proportion of 65 percent of the total Facebook accounts, indicating the dominant users in Vietnam (We Are Social Singapore, 2017).

Nevertheless, despite the rocketing prevalence of Facebook in Vietnam, there has been a serious lack of intensive research on this social platform nationwide (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2015). Moreover, among limited prior research on Facebook use in Vietnam, the investigation has tended to focus on users' attitudes and general use of Facebook compared with other social sites, Facebook usage under behavioral and psychological perspectives, and problems of Facebook usage such as privacy violation. While Vietnam is making efforts to reform its traditional rigid education system and join worldwide movements of integrating new technologies and social media into the teaching-learning process, Facebook use among young people for educational purposes remains a rarely-studied topic.

To address such a knowledge void, this research focuses on young Facebook users in higher education (HE) environment where students are mostly young adults – the dominant user group of Facebook – and the teaching-learning process is likely to be more flexible compared to lower levels, allowing more possibilities of integrating social media. Particularly, the research aimed to discern Vietnamese undergraduates' habits of using Facebook as a course supplement and/or in loose informal manners serving educational purposes, from which the benefits and difficulties of Facebook integration were subsequently examined. Also, the study called for young users' opinions on applying Facebook site in educational contexts, which gave more insights into learners as insiders and main beneficiaries of education. As a matter of fact, the Vietnamese education system has received much criticism for its teacher-centralization, rigidity, and impracticality. Therefore, as an effort to contribute to the ongoing educational reform in Vietnam, the research additionally examined the possibility of Facebook usage for connected learning which was believed to bridge formal and informal education while harnessing both social and individual forces. All in all, the research aspired to partly fill the knowledge gap on social media in relation to education in Vietnam while providing

educational practitioners and policy-makers more understanding of Facebook usage in HE, based on which better future practices and educational strategies could be implemented.

This research is organized into 9 main sections. After this introduction as the first section, the second section provides a general view of the Vietnamese HE and Ho Chi Minh University of Education (HCMUE) from which research data is collected. The third section reviews the literature on SNSs, Facebook platform and its relation to HE. The fourth section introduces the Theory of Facebook for Educational Usage and the Theory of Connected Learning which serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Next, the fifth section shows research objectives and research questions guiding the entire study. The sixth section presents the methodology applied to examine the research questions, after which the seventh section summarizes key findings of the research. The eighth section discusses the research results under main themes raised in the research questions while the final section concludes with implications and research validity and reliability.

2 VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Generally, the Vietnamese HE sector was highly government-centralized, which has led to many existing problems such as rigidness and impracticality. However, the HE system is gradually decentralizing, expanding throughout the country, and welcoming global trends to improve itself. Among large HE institutions undergoing such significant changes, the HCMUE, whose overview is subsequently presented, is chosen as the research setting for this study.

2.1 Higher Education System in Vietnam

Due to specific social-historical situation and development, the HE system in Vietnam was first constructed based on the old Soviet system, therefore, was highly centralized by the government (George, 2010). For decades, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) had not only taken charge of managing and steering the whole education system but also covered a host of institutional affairs including developing curriculum framework, tuition fee, quota of student intake, entrance examination and such (Fry, 2009; Hayden & Lam, 2010). Nevertheless, the government's reform of the economic policy (known as *Đổi mới* in Vietnamese) in 1986, which transformed the centralized socialist economy to market economy with socialist orientation, has prompted dramatic changes entailing the HE system. Besides state institutions, many private and foreign ones have been established. The whole HE system has expanded swiftly throughout the last few decades (Hayden & Pham, 2015) and decentralization has been gradually executed to empower institutional autonomy and more innovative development (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2007, 2010).

As affirmed in the latest Higher Education Law (August 2013) by the MoET, the Vietnamese HE is comprised of colleges, universities and member research institutes specializing in varied disciplines. Colleges provide 2- or 3-year diploma programs while universities provide 4-year degree programs. According to the statistics published by the MoET in July 2016, in the school year of 2015-2016, there were 223 universities (163 of which were state institutions) and 219 colleges (189 of which were public institutions) with the total student population of around 2.2 million. Presently, in the Vietnamese HE, 23 institutions are acknowledged as “key” institutions including two national universities (in the two biggest cities: Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh), five regional universities (in big

dynamic cities) and 16 other universities and institutes (of major disciplines). The rest of the institutions are usually of smaller size and distributed broadly over the country. Generally, HE institutions in Vietnam are stratified based on their missions, functions, objectives, and responsibilities. Such stratification in HE is aimed for efficient planning of the whole education system, responding to current socio-economic requirements, and eventually, empowering the national development (Higher Education Law, 2013).

The high investment of 20% of the state budget allocated for education and current policy changes have been vital for the improvement of the Vietnamese HE. One of the most notable characteristics of the present HE system is its impressive growth rate (Hayden & Pham, 2015):

Whereas in 1993 there were 162,000 HE students, by 2013 there were 2,177,299 HE students (MOET, 2015). Over this period, the HE participation rate, which indicates the proportion of the relevant age group participating in HE, climbed from below five percent to about 25 percent. The enrollment growth has been so strong that hundreds of new universities and colleges have had to be established during the past decade. (Hayden & Pham, 2015, pp. 20-21)

Besides the quantitative expansion, HE in Vietnam is in a fast pace of opening and integrating to benefit from international academic quintessence (Hayden & Pham, 2015). Hundreds of international partnerships have been established while foreign institutions or foreign modeling institutions, namely the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Fulbright University Vietnam (a non-profit university of foreign investment), are emerging and gaining increasing public credibility.

Aside from such advancement, the Vietnamese HE system is still facing various restraints, such as the low financial budget, weak managerial and governmental system (Hayden & Pham, 2015), and substantial remnant hindrances from the past top-down, centralized system (Tran, 2012). Such constraints have brought certain obstacles to the development of the system, particularly the teacher-centered and inefficient curriculum (Phan, Lupton, & Watters, 2016), educational inequality among genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicity, and places of residence (Hayden & Pham, 2015), and ill-preparation for transition to working life (Tran, 2013).

In awareness of this current situation of the Vietnamese HE, the research chose to investigate the usage of Facebook and its educational potential, attempting to provide more insights into students' practices in HE and clarify possible impacts of social media on HE improvement.

2.2 Ho Chi Minh City University of Education

The HCMUE, which specializes in the tertiary-level training of teachers and lecturers, was founded in 1957 in the dynamic Ho Chi Minh City. Being designated by the MoET as one of the key 23 HE institutions, and of the two prime pedagogical universities nationwide, the HCMUE is holding the leading role in training and providing well-qualified human resources not only for education but also other working fields all over Vietnam.

As presented on its official website (<http://www.hcmup.edu.vn>), the HCMUE is presently comprised of 22 faculties varying from Natural Sciences (such as Mathematics and Chemistry), Social Sciences (such as Literature and Political Education), Foreign Languages (such as English Language and Korean Language), to Specific Education (such as Early Childhood Education and Special Education). In total, the university is currently offering 39 undergraduate programs including 21 pedagogical programs (such as Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Teaching Physics, Educational Management, and Educational Psychology) and 18 non-pedagogical ones (such as Social Work, International Studies, Information Technology, and Vietnamese Studies). At present, the student population at HCMUE is roughly 19,000 students with approximately 9,000 full-time students, and the rest are of part-time or of inter-college transferring programs. In addition, the HCMUE is offering 22 master and nine doctoral programs that the university is exclusively in charge of or are joint-programs with oversea HE institutions (for example Caen University in France, Victoria Wellington University in New Zealand, and Fujian Normal University in China).

Due to its pivotal status (considering both role and scale) in the Vietnamese HE system and accessibility to its students of diverse disciplines, the HCMUE was selected as the research setting. Specifically, HCMUE students' usage and perceptions of Facebook for educational goals would be investigated, from which the influences and potential of Facebook for improving HE were generally discerned.

3 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Before examining the actual usage and impacts of Facebook in HE environment, it is essential to understand the platform with its key attributes as a social networking site. Therefore, this chapter begins with defining the concept of “social networking sites” and introducing their general functionalities. Next, the focus is particularly shifted to the Facebook site with its invention, development, and fundamental characteristics. Lastly, the chapter presents a literature review of how the platform has been utilized in HE contexts and differing views about its influences.

3.1 Social Networking Sites (SNSs) – Definition and Usage

SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace are expanding quickly, which is demonstrated by their sheer volume of users worldwide, new technical affordances that are constantly added, and their integration in almost every aspect of modern life. Due to the diversity of those social media channels, different definitions of SNSs have been constructed. However, they all converge on social networking as the term “social networking site” already reveals. SNSs are online platforms utilized by individuals to mainly serve the purpose of establishing and maintaining social relations in congruence with personal interests and concerns (Aydin, 2012). More specifically, in the views of Boyd & Ellison (2007), SNSs are web-based platforms that offer users the three following allowances: (1) creating a public or partly public profile; (2) establishing and managing connections with other users; and (3) having viewing capacity and getting access to other links in the platform. As defined by Bartlett-Bragg (2006, p. 3), SNSs are likewise social software applications that “augment group interactions and shared spaces for collaboration, social connections, and aggregate information exchanges in a web-based environment.” The term SNSs can also be used interchangeably with social networking or online social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Considered as one of the essences of Web 2.0 revolution (Issa, Isaías, & Kommers, 2016), SNSs have proliferated worldwide, offering users abundant opportunities to stay connected locally and globally besides mobile accessibility to knowledge repertoire.

Therefore, the potential role of social media as a facilitator and enhancer of learning is worth investigating. Among current SNSs, Facebook gains recognition as one of the most “dominant” social sites to be the “face of online social networks” (Tess, 2013, p. 61).

3.2 Facebook Social Networking Site

History and development

Facebook networking service, as stated on its official homepage (facebook.com), is “a social utility that helps people share information and communicate more efficiently with their friends, family, and co-workers.” Facebook was generated by an American student, Mark Zuckerberg, in 2004, initially aimed for the student community at Harvard University. However, due to its novelty, Facebook quickly transcended the intended border of Harvard University to other schools and was ultimately publicized in 2006 (Facebook - Statistics & Facts, n.d.). Ever since, Facebook has kept attracting augmenting new users who could access the Internet (Cassidy, 2006).



In a recent Facebook post, Mark Zuckerberg – founder and CEO of Facebook - claimed that by 26th July 2017, the Facebook community had rocketed tremendously to over two billion users worldwide (see Figure 3-1), 1.3 billion of which were active daily (Zuckerberg, 2017). With the ambition of “making the world more open and connected” as stated in his Facebook personal introduction, Zuckerberg and his co-workers are working industriously to expand the community and satisfy far more users’ demands, and Facebook has indisputably attained remarkable success thus far. Exemplars of this expansion are merger and acquisitions of other popular companies and products by Facebook, namely Instagram (2012) and WhatsApp (2014), as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1. Facebook Community Update, adopted from Mark Zuckerberg, July 2017

Functionalities and characteristics

Offering a wide range of functionalities, Facebook can be said to reflect current basic capabilities of SNSs (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Facebook enables users “to create and upgrade personal profiles, befriending, exchange messages and chat online” and “to organize themselves into groups in relation to personal and professional affiliations, which might include educational affiliations (such as schools), workplaces, interests, hobbies, and political and religious beliefs” (Aydin, 2012, p. 1094). Besides supportive functionalities for self-expression and socializing, Facebook also offers its users

handy tools to produce and curate multimedia content of multiple forms namely images, audio, and videos. Typical lately-added and welcomed functionalities are Live Streaming (allowing users to broadcast a video lively and publicly) and Save (enabling users to save and categorize Facebook posts for later access).

3.3 Usage of Facebook in Higher Education

3.3.1 General usage and perceptions

Since its publication, Facebook has been embedded and become indispensable to many people in modern life, especially among young people whom Prensky (2001, p. 1) refers to as “digital natives.” They are believed to be “all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1) in which social networks are entailed. Also, it has been shown that students in HE (and in general) are substantial users of Facebook (Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Junco R., 2012; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Rhoades, Irani, Telg, & Myers, 2008). Therefore, it is logical that this medium has been increasingly integrated into educational contexts that are an indispensable part of students’ lives and has since provoked profuse research.

By studying the adoption process and usage purposes of 606 Facebook users, Mazman & Usluel (2010) constructed a model explicating how Facebook could be used for educational aims, comprising three key purposes: communication, collaboration, and materials/resources sharing. The model has been tested and confirmed by the later research of Arteaga Sánchez et al. (2014) and Manasijevic, Živkovic, Arsic, & Milošević (2016), proposing a general view of how students utilize Facebook in university contexts. Revolving around some similar notions but from a different perspective, Selwyn’s research (2009) analyzing Facebook wall activity of 909 British undergraduates revealed that the students usually used Facebook for critiquing university experiences, exchanging practical/logistical information (such as learning schedules, assignment deadlines, or exam dates), and discussing academic topics raised in their courses. Two other prominent themes of students’ Facebook engagement found were “supplication and the seeking of moral support” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 167) or sympathy regarding university demands, and making studies-related “banter” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 168).

Despite being high Facebook users, students appear to hold different perceptions of incorporating Facebook in HE. In some studies, students expressed a mild to positive attitudes. A study on 161 students from four Australian universities showed that 51% of them acknowledged the benefits of Facebook as a learning tool, especially for enhancing interaction and collaborative

learning (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, 2012). Such favorable attitudes are consistent with results from a later study of Barczyk & Duncan (2013) on 106 American students who used Facebook as an instructional supplement in four courses. Of all the respondents, around 51% agreed that their overall Facebook experience was positive while 76% believed that Facebook integration promoted their personal and professional development. On the contrary, a relatively low proportion (23.1%) of 226 Serbian students (from University of Belgrade) thought that Facebook was highly beneficial for education (Manasijevic et al., 2016), indicating the rest of the students showed neutral to disapproving opinions about Facebook integration.

The prevalence of Facebook has not only provoked diverse reactions from its direct users – the undergraduates - but also inspired numerous research on Facebook application and its impacts on HE. There have been controversial findings as some studies claimed standing-out affordances of Facebook that enforced better learning efficiency while others revealed drawbacks of such an application or even its negative correlation to learning outcomes.

3.3.2 Benefits of using Facebook in HE

A well-acknowledged benefit of using Facebook in HE is fostering interaction with friends and teachers (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2015; Irwin et al., 2012; Ophus & Abbitt, 2009). It was found that student users most valued Facebook for effective exchange of studies-related information, organizing academic groups, and interpersonal collaboration (Manasijevic et al., 2016). Similarly, in a research on 120 Architecture students who used Facebook as a course supplement (McCarthy, 2010), over 90% of them showed appreciation on online discussion through Facebook and acknowledged better relationships with peers. Through research, Facebook has also been proved to improve educational interactions and teacher-learner relationships in HE (Berg, Berquam, & Christoph, 2007; Roblyer, 2010). As argued by Bowers-Campbell (2008), by reinforcing interaction and collaboration with peers and faculty, Facebook could help improve the efficacy of students' self-learning. In a broader view, it has been confirmed that the students are more likely to show commitment to building educational connections and participating educational activities on Facebook (Al-rahmi, Othman, & Musa, 2014; Maloney, 2007).

Facebook can also serve as a cyber-platform for sharing and spreading knowledge. Students throughout research have acknowledged its effectiveness in providing them with easier access to academic materials of formal courses and learning resources for references (Arteaga Sánchez et al., 2014; Hung & Yuen, 2010; Irwin et al., 2012; Ophus & Abbitt, 2009). The already “students' immersion with Facebook” (Staines & Lauchs, 2013, p. 286) and “Facebook's easy-to-use and

aesthetically appealing interface” (Hurt, et al., 2012, p. 14) have definitely been crucial for its prominent adoption in education. The students soon gain “a sense of familiarity” and can easily mitigate “the risks of technological frustration” when applying Facebook in their learning (Manca & Ranierit, 2013, p. 488).

Also, such aforementioned ease of use partly explains the common implementation of Facebook as a learning management system (LMS) by teachers to enhance students’ involvement and interaction. As defined by Yueh & Hsu (2008, p. 59), LMS is an e-tool that supports teachers to conduct “instructional activities such as presenting information, managing course materials, and collecting and evaluating student work” in online or hybrid teaching. As a matter of fact, Facebook has been employed as an LMS by more and more teachers. In a study in Singapore (Wang et al., 2012), the students generally felt contented with fundamental affordances of Facebook as an LMS despite raising certain concern about privacy and technical limitations. Another research on 107 university students by Hurt et al. (2012) revealed that students using Facebook Group as a learning forum performed better learning outcomes compared to those adopting Blackboard Vista and e-Learning Commons which were conventional LMS tools. It was also found by Jong, Lai, Hsia, Lin, & Liao (2014) that Facebook surpassed the Bulletin Board System and other e-platforms regarding its simplicity of exchanging academic materials, quick access to study-related posts, and interpersonal interactions.

Regarding the direct relationship between Facebook usage and learning outcomes, Ainin, Naqshbandi, Moghavvemi, & Jaafar (2015) found from their study of 1165 university students that the more the students utilized Facebook, the better academic performance they perceived themselves to achieve. Similarly but focusing on the actual and numeral outcome, Lambić (2016) claimed a positive correlation between the rate of using Facebook as a learning aid and students’ GPA.

3.3.3 Drawbacks of using Facebook in HE

As a social network, Facebook offers all typical functions of social interaction and entertainment that are referred to by Tang et al. (2015, p. 201) as “major selling points for attracting people to search it.” Thus, as users, students are easily distracted by other recreational contents flooding on Facebook while working on educational activities (Cassidy, 2006). A study of 396 Australian freshmen also showed that integration of Facebook was less likely augment students’ academic engagement but appeared to pose more distraction (Wise, Skues, & Williams, 2011).

Another consequence of integrating Facebook in education is the partly convergence of private and academic life, which has been reported uncomfortable and resistance-provoking by a number of students (Wang et al., 2012).

Moreover, in their study of control groups of 1,200 students, Dyson, Vickers, Turtle, Cowan, and Tassone (2015) concluded that Facebook application in the teaching-learning process triggered no better understanding and involvement among students. They also argued that the success of integrating SNSs in education depended heavily on “a complex interaction between a number of factors including the timing of content delivery, the integration of social media content with course assessment and the students’ own perspective on using social media for academic purposes” (Dyson, et al., 2015, p. 303).

On Facebook, with numerous functions assisting production and distribution of and access to digitalized content, the participatory culture among users is enhanced considerably. On the other hand, information found through Facebook is not necessarily verified before it is published. Therefore, “a problem connected to the large amount of information in Facebook is the lack of critical information analysis” (Klomsri, Grebäck, & Tedre, 2013, p. 142), which may lead to confusion and usage of inaccurate information among the undergraduates.

The negative correlation between Facebook use and academic performance has also been detected by Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) and Junco R. (2012, 2015), stating that students who commit more time and use Facebook more frequently (for general purposes) tend to perform worse in their learning.

Last but not least, the occurrences of cyber-bullying among undergraduates have been disclosed in different studies. The literature review of indirect bullying among female adolescents in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and North America reported an escalation of cyber-bullying fuelled by social media, especially Facebook (Catanzaro, 2011). Also, in the research of Willems and Bateman (2011), cyber-bullying was proved as a notable pitfall of integrating Facebook in HE.

3.3.4 Facebook: formal vs informal learning and individual vs social force

While the values of Facebook in formal education have been a topic of controversial debates, its potential for informal learning and aggregation of both individual and social force for better academic achievements appears more evident. A research on 12 African young adults (18 to 29 years old) by Klomsri et al. (2013, p. 142) proposed that Facebook offered an “ideal setting for informal learning” by promoting individual development and social connection. Specifically, this social network could facilitate self-regulating learning by 1) widening access to diverse media contents

which tailored better to meet personal interests; 2) augmenting collective support as users could exchange constructive feedback, encouragement, and help; and 3) mitigating time, language, and spatial restraints (Klomsri, et al., 2013). Another research on the benefits of Facebook in universities by Ahern, Feller, & Nagle (2016, p. 45) revealed that participating in Facebook Groups reinforced communication and support among group members, resulting in what was termed as “informal peer learning” while allowing student users “a broader engagement in the process of learning” as they wished.

In the scope of this research, besides Facebook usage in HE together with its advantages and disadvantages, the potential of Facebook for promoting informal education, connecting formal and informal learning, and mobilizing social force would be discerned.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

4.1 Theory of Facebook for Educational Usage

The Theory of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes is a structural model explicating how Facebook users utilize Facebook to benefit their studies. The model is constructed by Mazman & Usluel (2010) and takes into account both technical and social dimensions of Facebook as an innovation. In their study of 606 voluntary Facebook users (around 70% of whom were in college), the model of Facebook usage for educational purposes was proposed as an integral part of a larger structural model including two more components: Facebook adoption process and Facebook users' goals. The variables affecting these two components were believed to cast light on the educational usage of Facebook. Figure 4-1 summarizes Mazman's and Usluel's proposed model of usage objectives and usage process, constructed based on their thorough literature review on adoption, diffusion, acceptance, usage theories, and educational potential of existing features of Facebook.

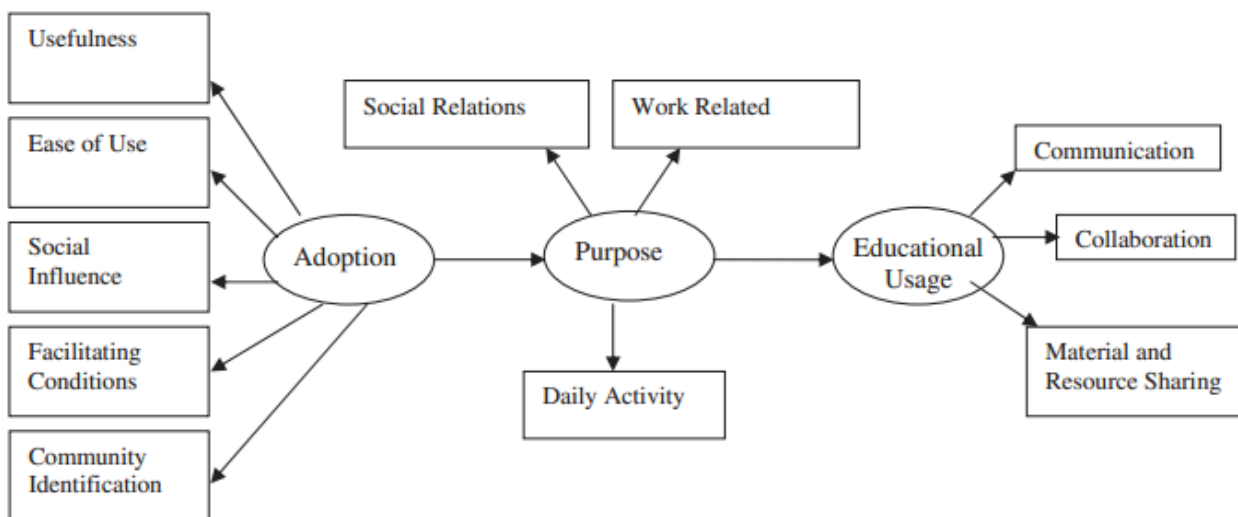


Figure 4-1. Purposes of using Facebook and Facebook adoption (Mazman and Usluel, 2010)

Data was collected through an online survey enquiring about respondents' demographic details and general usage patterns of Facebook. The questionnaire also examined Facebook users' purposes and perceptions through a set of Likert-scale questions whose validity and reliability had been tested by confirmatory and explanatory factor analysis.

By using structural equation testing model, Mazman and Usluel (2010) found out that the five observed variables, namely Usefulness, Ease of Use, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions and Community Identity, had a significant positive influence on adoption of Facebook with Usefulness determined as the most important predictor. Also, the three observed variables of Social Relations, Work Related, and Daily Activities had a significant positive influence on the purposes of Facebook usage with Social Relations appeared to be an essential factor. Similarly, Communication, Collaboration and Material and Resource Sharing were proved to have a roughly equal significant influence on the educational usage of Facebook (see Figure 4-1).

Regarding the relations among the three main components of this model, Facebook users' purposes and Facebook adoption were found to have a significant positive relationship, meaning that how a person perceived Facebook would strongly affect the usage of Facebook. Moreover, Facebook adoption and educational usage also had a positive correlation. Specifically, Facebook adoption mediated by purposes of Facebook usage accounted for around 50% of the variance of educational usage, indicating the educational opportunities offered by the Facebook site. All in all, as Mazman and Usluel (2010) concluded, this Theory of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes revealed that "people first use[d] an innovation in their everyday lives for different purposes while considering its usefulness, ease of use or social influence. Then, these purposes initiate[d] and shape[d] the educational usage of that innovation" (p. 451).

This early model on the relationship between Facebook and education has been thereafter tested and reconfirmed by Arteaga Sánchez et al. (2014) in their research of 214 Spanish university students. Also, Manasijevic et al. (2016) proved the validity of this hypothesized structure and disclosed that Serbian undergraduate students considered collaboration through academic communities the prime benefit of Facebook usage in HE.

As recommended that future research should study more deeply all the aspects and dimensions involved in the Facebook usage of college students (Mazman & Usluel, 2010), in this study, the three categories of educational purposes of Facebook in HE served as focal points. The classifications of educational usage were defined as follows (Mazman & Usluel, 2010):

- Communication: Communicating activities among learners and their teachers, facilitating school practices or learning activities such as discussions, spreading announcements and informing logistic notices.
- Collaboration: Collaborative activities that enhance learning such as exchanging ideas, cooperate in projects, helping each other or joining different communities of similar interests/concerns.

- Materials and Resources Sharing: activities of transferring multimedia resources, materials, documents, etc., serving learning purposes or educational development.

Based on these three particular categories, this thesis aimed to examine students' usage of Facebook for educational purposes. Also, from such investigation into usage patterns, the research attempted to detect both advantages and disadvantages of Facebook application in HE.

The Theory of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes proposed by Mazman and Usluel (2010) set the ground for examining Facebook usage in academic contexts that were relatively formal and institutional. However, it is assumed that Facebook, as a social medium, has great potential for students to access and engage in shared knowledge construction while having sufficient control over their own learning, which promisingly helps connect the formal and informal learning spheres (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Therefore, in conjunction with the Theory of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes (Mazman & Usluel, 2010), the Theory of Connected Learning (Ito et al., 2013) was also utilized as a theoretical framework for this study.

4.2 Connected Learning Theory

Fundamental principles

Connected learning is a pedagogical approach valuing learning that is interest-driven, socially embedded, and oriented towards educational, economic, or political development. Its fundamental notion is that learning is successful when learners are motivated by personal interests or concerns while receiving social support from other people or communities, and consequently, manage to connect such learning with interests to academic attainments, career building, or civic involvement (Ito, et al., 2013). All in all, the Theory of Connected Learning aims at filling the “gap between how learners live and how and what they learn at school” (Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2014, p. 9), or in other words, it “connect[s] formal education with other meaningful social contexts” (Brown, Czerniewicz, & Noakes, 2015, p. 5). Under such a perspective, learning does not reside within any fixed restricted settings, but in a complex of contexts spreading over different disciplines and having blurred boundaries among personal, social, formal and informal spheres (Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2014).

Connected learning is guided and defined by this broader social vision, where the functions of education are better integrated and serve the interests and needs of non-dominant young people and their communities. It is less a “new” approach to learning than it is an ongoing effort to draw linkages between existing approaches that share a set of core values and goals. (Ito et al., 2013, p.34)

As the most tangible form of education, formal learning is defined as “a systematic, organized education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology” (Dib, 1988, p. 300). Recognized as a supplement to formal education, informal learning is rather flexible as it occurs whenever and wherever possible, revolving around daily personal experiences (Belle, 1982). Notably, in our current age of information, informal learning can be conducted not only physically but also virtually or in a hybrid manner due to the availability of abundant digitalized content and up-to-date technologies (Klomsri, et al., 2013) among which social media hold a prominent role.

As the result of their research on learning in the context of current social, economic, technological and cultural changes, Ito and his colleagues (2013) proposed the Connected Learning Framework which emphasizes educational equity and deployment of new media to “build communities and collective capacities for learning and opportunity” (Ito, et al., 2013). Despite the suitability to different age groups, Ito and his co-workers chose adolescents and young adults as focal points for their proposed frameworks. The rationale behind was that learners of these age groups were at crucial developmental phases of shaping personal interests as well as identities in the communities, which was vital for connected learning. Furthermore, adolescence and early adulthood were argued to be the time when learners paid more attention to the practicality of education, or, in other words, attempted to connect what they had learned to real life and future career development.

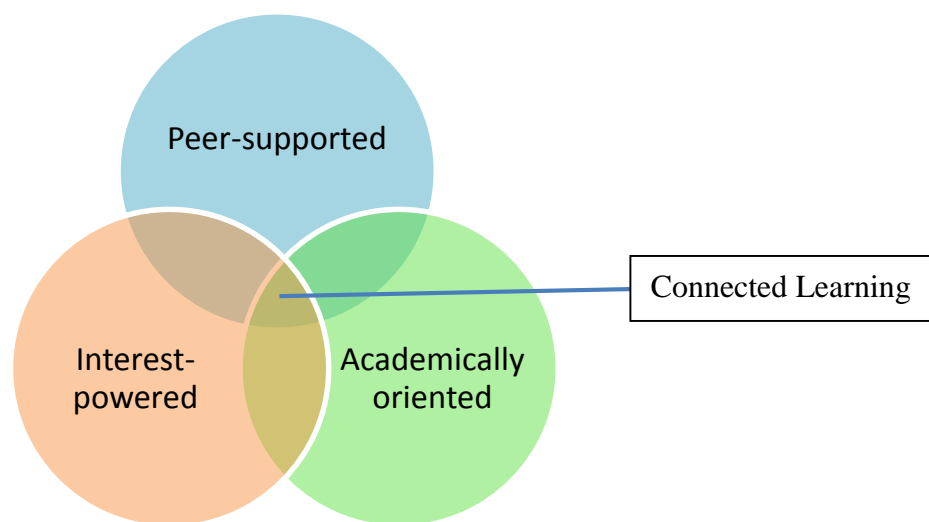


Figure 4-2. The three crucial contexts knitted together for connected learning (Ito et al., 2013)

According to Ito et al. (2013), connected learning is primarily comprised of three critical contexts (see Figure 4-2): 1) peer-supported context represents daily interactions with friends in which young people get engaged and exchange ideas as well as constructive feedback with one another; 2) interest-powered context describes the situation in which the studied subjects actually pique learner’ interests and concerns, thus enable better learning outcomes; 3) academically oriented context is

setting in which the students can develop their potential by linking their interests and social interaction to academic attainments, career success, or civic engagement.

In addition, three characteristics are proposed as core properties of connected learning experiences. They are 1) being production-centred which represents the high possibility of generating a broad range of meaningful knowledge or media content in different ways; 2) having a shared purpose, representing the common targets across generations, cultures, or communities; and 3) being openly-networked, indicating the large but connected learning network in which educational resources are plentiful and accessible to all members. Upon those contexts and central features, Ito et al. (2013) point out four principles for designing connected learning environments which are 1) every individual and group are able to participate in different ways; 2) learning happens through hands-on experiences; 3) “need to know” and “need to share” are constantly triggered by interests; and 4) “everything is interconnected”, meaning that learners get engaged in a matrix of supportive tools, connections, and interactions.

New media for connected learning

Notably, in Ito et al.’s framework of connected learning (2013), new media emerge as not only inevitable parts of digital age but highly prospective tools to intensify opportunities for connected learning.

We see new media, particularly as it is linked to youth-centered interests and community contribution, as providing new entry points into learning, opportunity, achievement, and civic participation. As a society, we are clearly early in exploring these new pathways. (Ito et al., 2013, p.34)

As remarked by Mihailidis (2014), this Connected Learning theory aims to “embrace a vibrant digital media landscape and savvy media users to build more equal, collaborative, and experiential learning experience” (p. 117).

Figure 4-3 depicts the 4 aspects on which new media can impact positively to promote connected learning, as proposed by Ito et al. (2013). Specifically, it is proposed that new media can widen access to connected learning by 1) empowering the participatory culture (in which users engage in interactive activities and exchange constructive feedback) and individual learning style and pace; 2) facilitating access to a wide range of educational resources and communities of similar interest/expertise to enhance self-directed and interest-driven learning; 3) fostering social connection through which users can establish relationships with people of similar interests and consequently get supported in developing their expertise, career path, or civic engagement; and 4) empowering marginalized users/cultures to be more available and active, through which collective contribution is triggered.



Figure 4-3. Empowering roles of social media for connected learning (Ito et al., 2013)

New media with their various affordances are suggested to be a useful “connector” between different life spheres and a “bridge” bringing learners to more educational opportunities.

It proposes that the opportunities afforded by new media should be leveraged in the service of a more equitable educational system. These opportunities should connect formal education with other meaningful social contexts in the everyday life of youth, whether that is peer relations, family life, or their work and career aspirations. (Brown et al., 2015, pp. 4-5)

In the scope of this research, Facebook, a typical example of thriving new media, was discerned whether it was offering undergraduate students more opportunities for connected learning as Ito et al. (2013) claimed in their framework for connected learning.

5 RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Being espoused mainly by the constructivist and pragmatic worldview, this study aims at firstly, identifying which functions of Facebook are being used by students for educational purposes; secondly, investigating how students utilize them and how they perceive using Facebook for education; thirdly, specifying the benefits and pitfalls of Facebook application in teaching-learning process for further improvement and development; and lastly, the potential of Facebook usage for connected learning to better learning outcomes in Vietnamese HE.

In the scope of this research, Facebook was not studied as a supplementary tool for any specific courses, but in all possible ways that the platform was supplementing learning in HE environment. The following research questions were formed to obtain the research aims:

- How are undergraduate students using Facebook for educational purposes?

+ For what specific educational purposes are they using Facebook? What are their usage habits?

+ What are their perceptions of Facebook use for educational purposes?

- What are the advantages of Facebook use for educational purposes in undergraduate education?

- What pitfalls do undergraduate students encounter when using Facebook for educational purposes?

- What is the potential of Facebook for promoting connected learning?

The setting of this research was in Ho Chi Minh City – the city of highest Facebook penetration in Vietnam. In April 2017, with roughly 11 million active Facebook users, Ho Chi Minh City was reported by the We Are Social agency to be among the top 10 cities of largest Facebook community worldwide. Specifically, data was garnered from bachelor students from HCMUE – one of the two prime pedagogical universities in Vietnam.

6 RESEARCH METHODS

6.1 Instrument and Sample

Holding the constructivist and pragmatic views, I adopted the mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative approach to gather various forms of data and gain a thorough understanding of the research problem. However, the quantitative approach played a descriptive role while the qualitative methodology was dominant in this research as such combination was relevant to the research aims. With the assumption that Facebook users were well aware of their Facebook usage to reflect on themselves and provide reliable information, questionnaires and interviews were used as tools for collecting data, both of which would be conducted online considering my spatial situation. Participation in the survey was voluntary and all data collected remained anonymous.

The study sample was undergraduate students at HCMUE in Vietnam, who were of different pedagogical and non-pedagogical majors. The choice of this population was due to the high possibility of access and diversity of respondents' majors. Surveyed students were categorized into four groups of majors: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Foreign Languages, and Specific Education (see Table 6-1).

Table 6 -1. Major clusters at HCMUE

No.	Cluster of majors	Included majors
1	Natural Sciences	Faculty of Mathematics - Informatics, Chemistry, Physics, Information Technology, and Biology
2	Social Sciences	Faculty of Literature, Geography, Political Education, and History
3	Foreign Languages	Faculty of English Language, Chinese Language, French Language, Russian Language, Japanese Language, and Korean Language
4	Specific Education	Faculty of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Physical Education, National Defense Education, Special Education, Psychology, and Education Science

6.2 Online Questionnaire

6.2.1 Structure

Grounded mainly on the model of Facebook Educational Usage (Mazman & Usluel, 2010), the survey was designed to examine how undergraduate students were presently using Facebook for educational purposes and how they perceived application of this platform in education. Survey items in the research of Mazman and Usluel (2010) and Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo, and Javed (2014) were used for reference. However, in this study, questioning items exploring the three categories of Communication, Collaboration, and Material and Resource Sharing were clarified in more details, for instance, educational interactions with communities beyond university in Communication and Collaboration were included. Furthermore, certain questions were designed to cover new functionalities of Facebook such as Live Streaming or bookmarking by Save function that were absent in previous research, to gain more updated insights into Facebook networking site.

The questionnaire, which aimed at discovering “the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 95), covered five main themes: respondents’ demographic information, general patterns of using Facebook, actual use of Facebook for educational purposes (under three sub-themes: communication, collaboration, and material and resource sharing), respondents’ opinions of applying Facebook to education, and problems that users were exposed to when using Facebook in their studies. The questionnaire consisted of 37 closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix 1). The semi-structured questionnaire helped mitigate researchers’ subjectivity while allowing the respondents to insert additional ideas about other possible educational purposes of Facebook usage and difficulties they faced (if applicable).

Also, to guarantee respondents’ clear understanding before answering, an explanation of “Facebook usage,” which served as the focal point throughout this research, was presented at the beginning of the online survey. The explanation clarified that “Facebook usage” encompassed all basic structures and features of Facebook social networking platform, namely News Feed, Groups, Timeline, Facebook Messenger, Multimedia Capacity (Photo, Audio, Live Streaming), Sharing, Comments and Reactions, Tagging, Bookmarking and so forth.

Last but not least, researcher’s brief profile, key themes subjected to questioning, and respondents’ consent for later use of survey data for research purposes were thoroughly presented on the very first slide of the online questionnaire, ensuring respondents’ full awareness of their participation. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were requested to leave their emails if they would be willing to join voluntary follow-up interviews on the research topic (see Appendix 1).

6.2.2 Implementation

The first draft questionnaire was initially shown to my professor, classmates, and colleagues for constructive comments, after which many critical changes were made. Then, the questionnaire was put online using Google Form application and tested by a pilot group of 21 randomly-chosen undergraduate students. Their responses had revealed questioning items that needed further editing before the questionnaire got published to the mass of students. After all amendments, the finalized questionnaire was spread by emails and Facebook channel to potential respondents from 30th December 2016 to 13th February 2017.

By the end of the survey period, 400 responses had been collected. However, some invalid responses were detected. The problem was that some answers had been fully repeated for several times. Accounting for this problem might be technical errors that enabled successful data submission without respondents' notice, which consequently made them re-submit over and over. After eliminating all invalid responses, the final data sample was 394 for online questionnaire.

6.3 *Online Interviews*

6.3.1 Structure

Online interviews were designed to cover themes of Facebook usage for Communication, Group-Working, Collaboration (within and beyond the university), Materials and Resources (for schoolwork, self-learning, and personal interests), and Benefits and Difficulties stemming from Facebook usage in student life. The theme-based interviews were semi-open with both guiding questions and space for interviewees to lead the conversations into their concerns, which helped gain optimal understanding on personal experiences with Facebook and figure out meanings made by student users themselves.

6.3.2 Implementation

Students who voluntarily left their emails in the questionnaire were contacted for arranging the online interviews. My initial attempt was to interview an equal amount of male and female students from each major cluster. However, not all emailed students responded when I contacted, which prompted me to send out more invitations than planned. In the end, from March to April 2017, I managed to

reach and interview five students. Table 6-2 describes the interviewees' demographic description and names by which they would be referred to throughout this research.

Table 6-2. Information of interviewees from HCMUE

No.	Referred to as	Major Cluster	Gender	School year
1	Student A	Foreign Languages	Female	3
2	Student B	Specific Education	Female	3
3	Student C	Specific Education	Female	1
4	Student D	Natural Sciences	Male	2
5	Student E	Foreign Languages	Female	1

The five theme-based interviews were conducted through online communication platforms of Skype, Google Hangouts, and Facebook Messenger. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded (upon interviewees' consent) for archive and retrieval.

6.4 Data Analysis

The researched data was organized and analyzed under main themes of respondents' demographic information, Facebook usage patterns, perception of Facebook use for educational purposes (entailing advantages and disadvantages of its application in HE), and the potential of Facebook integration for developing connected learning (entailing four sub-themes proposed in the Theory of Connected Learning proposed by Ito and his co-researchers in 2013).

Content analysis was used as the key approach to deduce meanings from the data collected through online questionnaires and interviews. As the data also included quantitative information, some basic statistical techniques such as frequency count and proportion measurement were applied for clearer data description.

7 FINDINGS

7.1 Patterns of Facebook Usage

7.1.1 Users' demographic characteristics

Participants of the study were 394 undergraduate students from HCMUE, 23.6% of which were male and 76.4% were female. The significantly uneven distribution between the two genders could be explained by the females' stronger preference for pedagogical majors and the actual dominant number

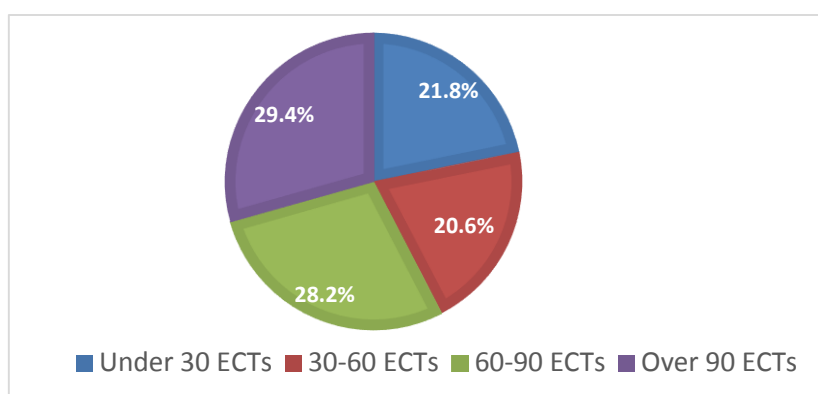


Figure 7-1. Distribution of researched students according to collected credits

of female students compared to the males in HCMUE.

The majority (97.2%) of the students were young adults, aging from 18 to 24, the rest belong to the 25-34 age group (2.3%) and 35-44 one (0.5%). Surveyed students were distributed relatively equally among school year as illustrated in Figure 7-1.

Classification of students into school years was based on the credits they had earned by the time of participating in the survey, according to the Regulations No. 43/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT on Credit System of HE issued on 15th August 2007 by the Vietnamese MoET.

The surveyed students came from four discipline clusters entailing all undergraduate majors available at HCMUE, namely Languages (41.9%), Specific Education (25.9%), Natural Sciences (16.8%), and Social Sciences (15.5%).

7.1.2 General Facebook usage

The most popular devices used for accessing Facebook among students were smartphones (87.6%) and laptops (81.7%). Regarding online connections, it was reported that the majority of students were

friends with school-mates and teachers from their university, which respectively accounted for 99.5% and 86%. As reported by the students in the interviews, most of their university lecturers were using Facebook, especially young ones. While connecting with university mates on Facebook appeared to be evidently favored, the students had different views on “adding friends” with their teachers. Some were quite open in connecting, some just added lecturers they had actual contact with or special respect for, and some totally excluded teachers from their Facebook network as they claimed to see no point in connecting.

“I don’t see the point in being friends with lecturers. I can’t text them on Facebook. I also don’t care much about what they post, and if I just press “like” for their posts to make them happy, I don’t think they will recognize me among many other students. So I did not do that [be friends with lecturers on Facebook]. I will only make friends with lecturers who inspire me and make me really want to follow them.” (Student C)

Facebook was shown to be an indispensable part of youngster’s life as 96.2% of the surveyed students and all interviewees used the platform daily (see Figure 7-2).

From the garnered data, it seemed that the prevalence of Facebook among undergraduates stemmed from not only users’ personal preference but also extrinsic factors of student life.

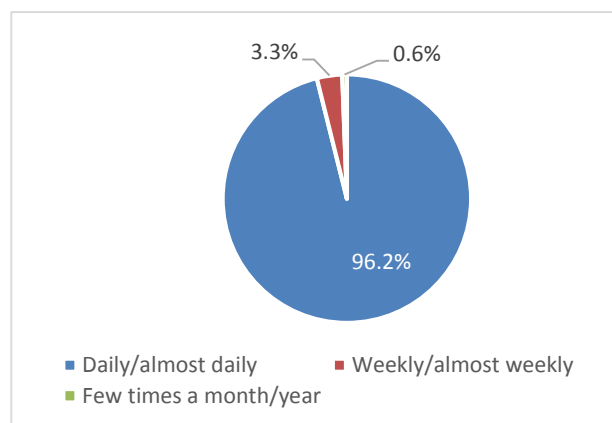


Figure 7-2. Frequency of Facebook usage

“I use Facebook quite often as I have to check daily things I need to do or assignments from the university.” (Student E)

“In the first year at university, some students did not have a Facebook account, but then they all started to use it. [...] During our first year, some students actually got annoyed because they weren’t used to using Facebook, but now, especially from 3rd to 4th year, most of them have taken it more easily [...] because if you don’t get online, you will definitely miss new posts and get outdated.” (Student B)

At present, HCMUE was providing its students with free Wi-Fi. Although the internet signal was not strong and stable across all campus areas, students reported using Facebook relatively comfortably whenever they wished to. However, time for being active on Facebook platform varied considerably among users. Regarding proportion, spending one to six hours weekly for Facebook covered the largest number of students (30.2%), which was followed by seven to ten hours with 22.6% of the respondents. Markedly, 20.6% of them admitted to spending over 20 hours while 18.5% spent 11 to 20 hours weekly on the platform.

7.1.3 Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes

Communication

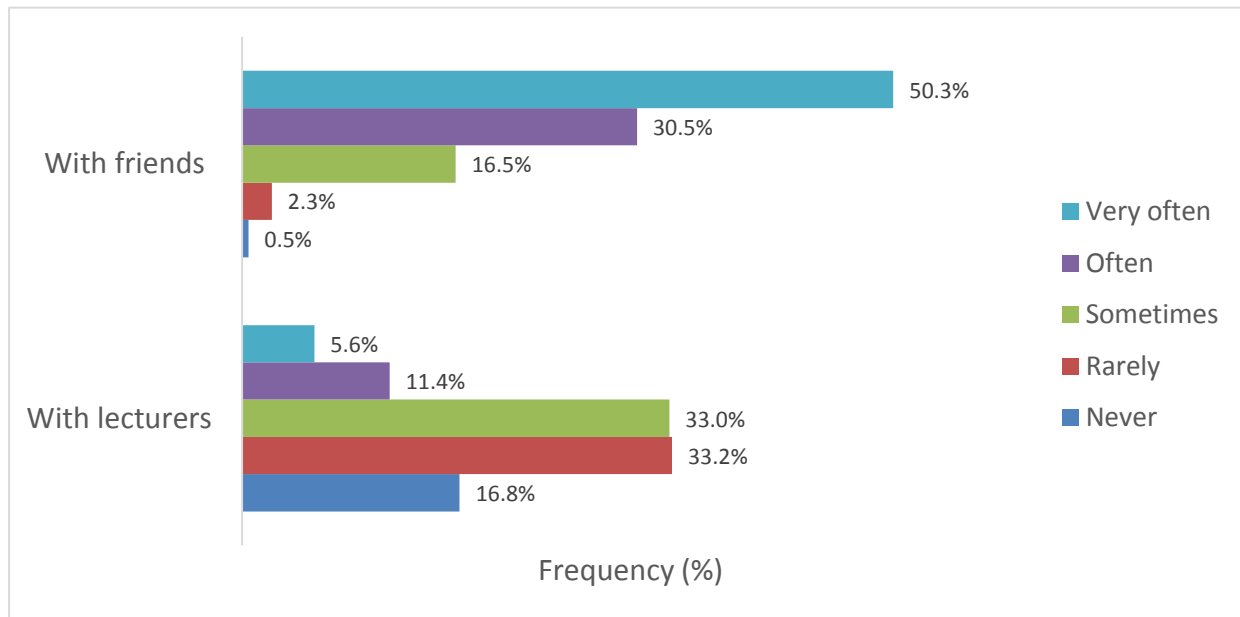


Figure 7-3. Communication on Facebook for studies-related topics

Figure 7-3 depicts how Facebook was utilized for exchanging information. Particularly, the students expressed distinct favor upon Facebook for connecting with their peers and discussing academic topics with around 80.7% reported to conduct such usage often or very often. While interacting with university friends was popular, interaction with lecturers happened on a less regular basis, precisely 66.2% of the students seldom or sometimes while only a small percentage (5.6%) usually did so.

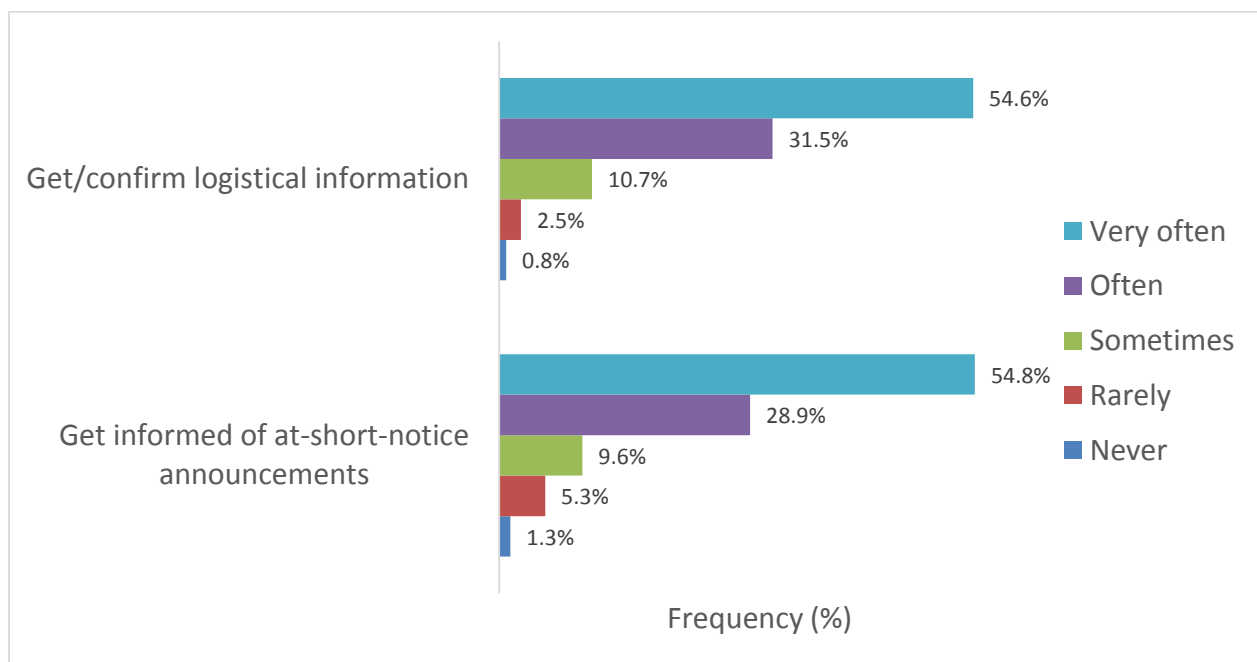


Figure 7-4. Communication on Facebook for studies-related information

As shown in Figure 7-4, exchanging logistical information (such as learning schedule, dates for course registration, exam dates, etc.) with schoolmates and teachers on Facebook was another primary purpose with 86% of the students reported frequent or very frequent involvement. Interestingly, it was revealed from the survey that Facebook served as a useful tool for spreading short-noticed university announcements with 83.8% of the students claimed to get frequently informed through this platform. Data from interviews also showed that communication of logistical information could occur in forms of direct conversations or asynchronous interaction in Facebook groups (to be clarified later).

Collaboration

a. In the university community

The survey data revealed that facilitating group work or projects from the formal courses was another significant function of Facebook among undergraduate students. Around 58.6% of the respondents very often and 28.9% often used Facebook for cyber group-working space or interacting with group-mates to execute and accomplish academic group tasks. The handy and user-friendly grouping function of Facebook has allowed users to organize and operate limitless groups at ease for both communicating and collaborating. Table 7-1 below summarizes the types and characteristics of Facebook groups in which interviewees reported to participate.

Table 7-1. Types and characteristics of Facebook groups

Type	Creator and administrator	Main activities
Group for the whole student community of the Department	Usually Department authorities	- Post logistical notices/ announcements - Post working opportunities/ scholarship
Group for students of the same university cohort	Department authorities or students by themselves	- Share learning handouts/ materials/ resources (from lecturers to students or among students)
Group for a particular program class	Usually students of that class	- Exchange information of study-related activities
Group for a particular course	Usually lecturers responsible for the course	- Remind of study-related issues - Vote for a consensus (using Poll function)
Group for specific assignments/projects	Usually students	- Exchange ideas on teamwork - Assign tasks to members
Group chat (on Facebook Messenger) for specific assignments/projects	Usually students	- Share learning materials/resources - Vote for a consensus (using Poll function)

It appeared that surveyed students were being embraced in a complex matrix of Facebook groups of different sizes and organizational levels for communicating and collaborating within the university environment. In particular, all interviewed students revealed to be simultaneously members of their department group, program class group, course groups and assignment groups, not to mention Facebook groups for extra-curricular activities.

“We have Facebook groups for most of the courses. In courses which lecturers require an end-of-term assignments or projects, there will be smaller Facebook groups accordingly for those tasks. Gosh, now I can’t recall how many Facebook groups of which I am a member. Too many groups!” (Student B)

Regardless of Facebook groups initially created for the purpose of disseminating certain information to members, interactions in all other groups (even those specifically established for group-working) were reported to involve minimal deep dialogues and mainly serve group organization and management.

“Actually, Facebook groups are set mostly for sending materials, assigning tasks among members, and then uploading what we have done so that we can synthesize and complete the final assignment. We actually don’t interact much, creating the group is much more for the convenience of collecting and connecting parts [done by each member].” (Student D)

Despite the fact that Facebook is offering profuse supportive functions for synchronous interaction such as voice calling, video calling, and live streaming, the respondents rarely used Facebook groups as a means for direct discussion on educational topics/group-work. All interviewed students mentioned combining online interaction with face-to-face meetings in which they raised opinions, gave feedback, synthesized and finalized the group products, and rehearsed the work (like presentation) if necessary.

“Mostly, [we] make online posts to assign tasks to members with deadlines, then everyone posts what they have completed. We usually don’t discuss online but in a face-to-face meeting at the campus, which is easier for communication.” (Student A)

“Before contacting in the Facebook group, we will face-to-face discuss basic ideas because we think communicating entirely through Facebook is not very efficient. [...] I don’t know about other people, but for many people around me and me, video calling is only for very close relationships or serious learning like when learning English language and the teacher requires [video calling for learning]. Usually, we don’t do that [video calling on Facebook] with strangers.” (Student C)

Interviewed students agreed that the collaborative affordances offered by Facebook were helpful for their studies, however, the efficacy of online group-working depended considerably on group members and group leader.

“If you are in a group like the one I am in with seven other members who are all responsible students, the group is always lively in preparation for the presentation. We always discuss actively to work out the best solutions. If you are in a group which is not so cooperative, using Facebook will be disadvantageous as it is impossible to call for awareness or pushing others. They can be forgetful, and you are busy with your own things, so the group task could not get finished, and it (group-working) is not efficient.” (Student B)

“It depends on your group and group members. For example, when I am the group leader, after posting anything, I have to check if all members have seen the post and left any comments. It’s a bit demanding for the assigner as not all members are online all the time or all of them have checked the post at the same time. So, I will have to text certain members to remind them, which is time-consuming for me.” (Student A)

b. Beyond the university community

Considering collaboration beyond university environment (see Figure 7-5), 49.5% of the participants described themselves to frequently or very frequently join other Facebook groups/communities of similar academic focuses/interests for self-studying and improvement. Meanwhile, 54.6% mentioned that it happened to them often or very often to get informed and join in beyond-university projects/activities that were related to or would benefit their studies at university. Furthermore, about 55.8% of the respondents often or very often participated in beyond-university Facebook groups/communities to search for information on further education or prospective major-related jobs.

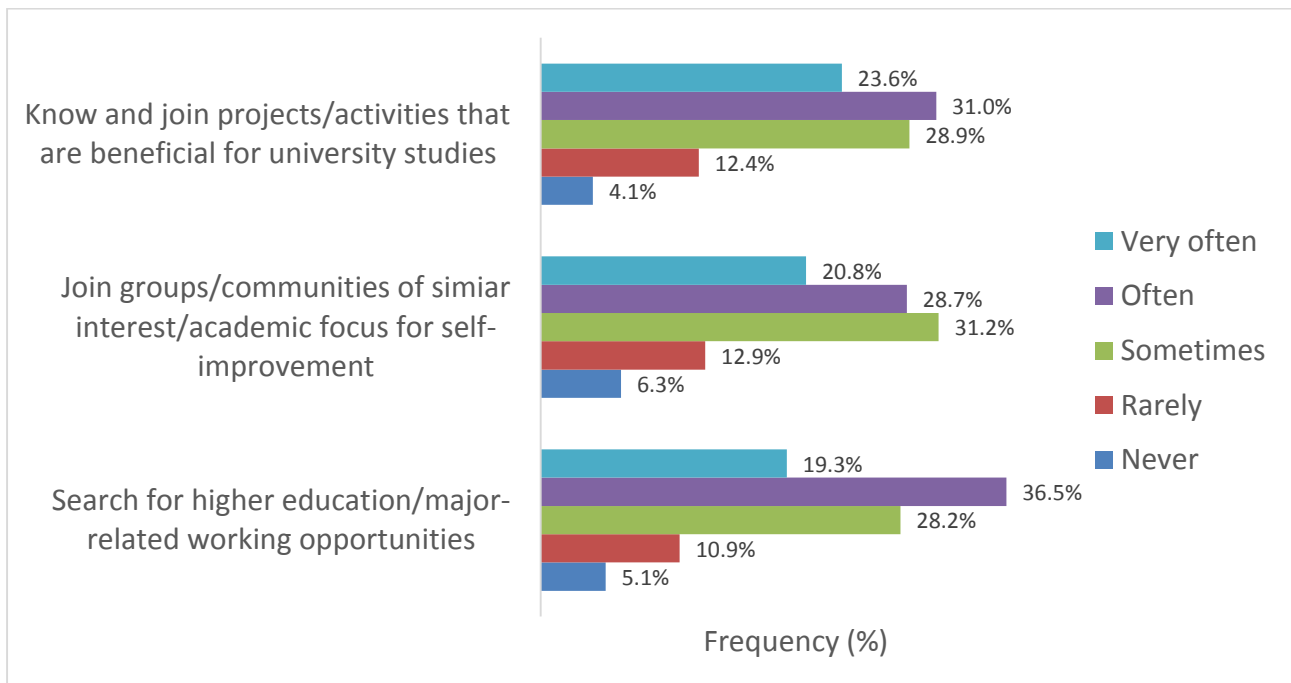


Figure 7-5. Participation and collaboration in Facebook beyond-university environment

Findings from the interviews indicated that all respondents were involved in a wide variety of beyond-university communities by joining in Facebook groups or following Facebook pages of what they

truly concerned themselves with. The groups and pages the interviewees participated in ranged from studies-related ones such as language learning, working opportunities, youth work, and career development to more personal or interest-driven ones like sports, presses, cooking, arts, and religion. Interestingly, once again, interactions in those groups and pages (except for the religious group) were reported to be rather one-way communication, meaning that the interviewees as group members or followers (of pages) simply updated themselves with new posts, saved relevant materials/resources for further use, learned or tried something out by themselves, and scarcely involved in any deep discussions or peer-review activities with other members.

To sum up, all five respondents admitted to having interaction with different communities beyond university through Facebook. Nonetheless, despite the variety of communities that the students involved and the interactive functions of Facebook, only one over five respondents acknowledged the close connection and significant influence from her religious Facebook group. The rest of them claimed no particularly close attachment, regular deep conversations, and remarkable development through Facebook connections to outside communities/agents.

Sharing materials/resources

Last but not least, Facebook appeared to be an efficient tool for accessing and sharing academic resources or learning materials (such as course handouts, reference materials, self-study materials, etc.). As illustrated in Figure 7-6, about 70.3% of the students reported having such usages regularly. Besides, the function of bookmarking and saving media content for later access was also popular with 57.9% of the students often or very often cached relevant or useful resources found through Facebook for their studies.

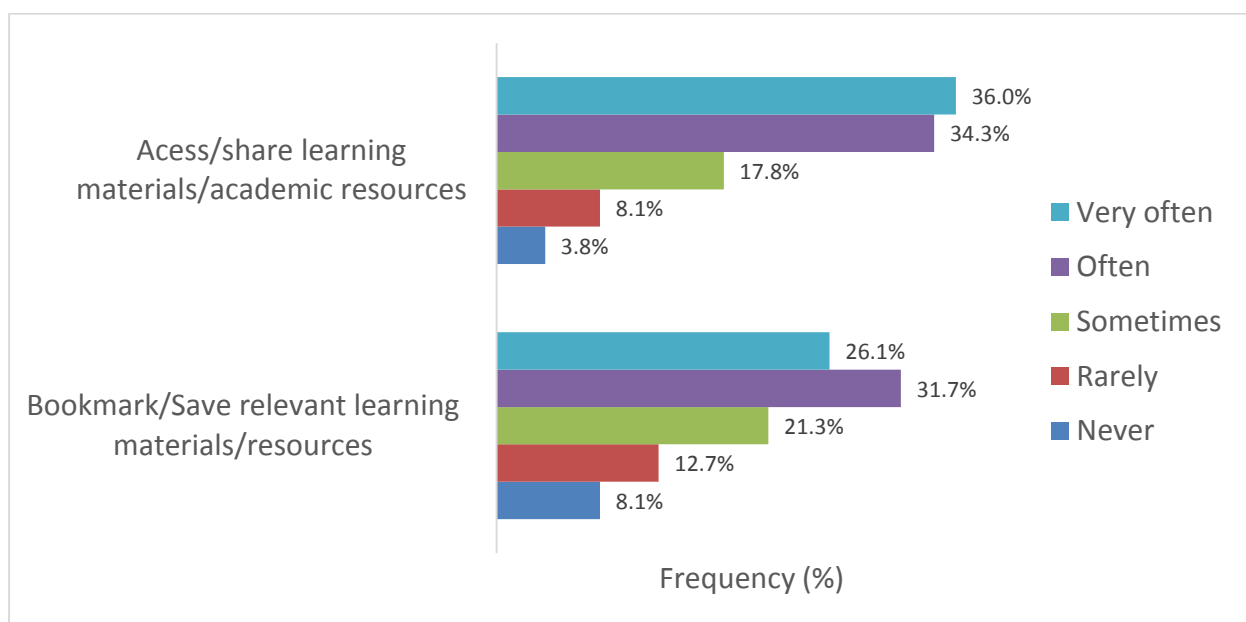


Figure 7-6. Facebook usage for learning materials/resources

Other minor usages for education

When questioned if they used Facebook in any other ways to benefit study experience, 9 students (2.3%) mentioned that Facebook helped access news of extra-curricular activities organized by the University Students' Association or the Youth Union and other voluntary teaching programs. This was also the most common answer for this open question. Besides, two students added using Facebook to update themselves on educational and other affairs (such as psychological, social, and political issues). Some other functions of Facebook mentioned were searching for scholarships, tracking academic contests, and serving as an "online USB" (the answerer claimed to frequently use Facebook to store and retrieve educational materials for printing so that he/she did not need an original USB).

7.2 Students Perceptions of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes

7.2.1 Advantages for education

Figure 7-7 reflects how students evaluated the impacts of Facebook on personal learning. The majority of surveyed students (69.8%) regarded Facebook as beneficial for education, in which 27.4% showed high approval. Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of respondents (23.4%) revealed neutral opinions of the impact of Facebook on their studies.

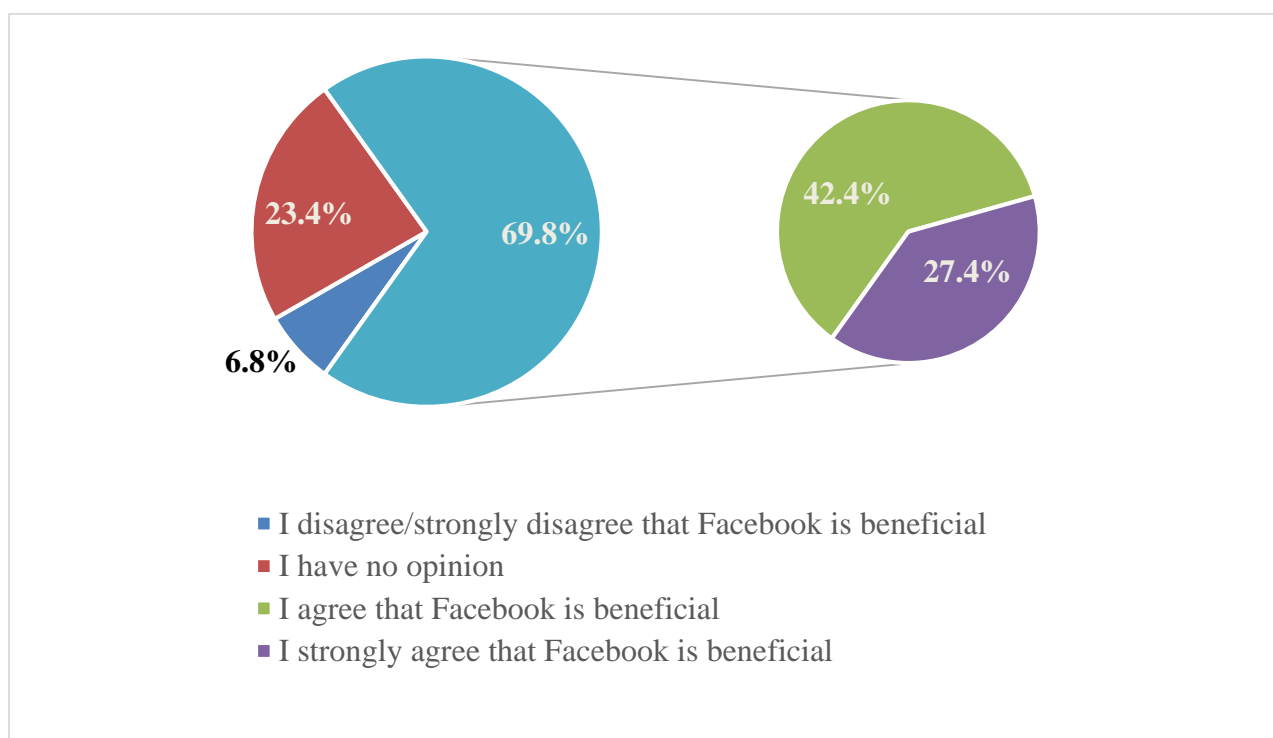


Figure 7-7. Students' opinion on the role of Facebook in personal learning experiences

Promoting communication, collaboration and accessing learning materials

When queried about the potential of Facebook for education, the students generally agreed or strongly agreed that Facebook was helpful for communication and exchanging school-related information (87.3%), for enhancing group work and collaboration among group members (79.4%), and for accessing or sharing educational resources/materials (81.7%).

Clarifying the prospective affordance of Facebook for academic resources, 80.2% of the students acknowledged the convenience of accessing and sharing rich multimedia resources through Facebook, which consequently improved their learning experience. Additionally, about 65.2% of the respondents showed agreement on the assisting role of Facebook in promoting collaboration beyond school community for academic and professional development.

“I think Facebook is not only convenient for entertainment but it also brings me to many working opportunities. Almost all jobs I have done so far stemmed from information I found on Facebook.” (Student A)

Formal vs Informal education

Lastly, considering specific forms of education, the students seemed to be more skeptical of applying Facebook to formal education than informal one (see Figure 7-8).

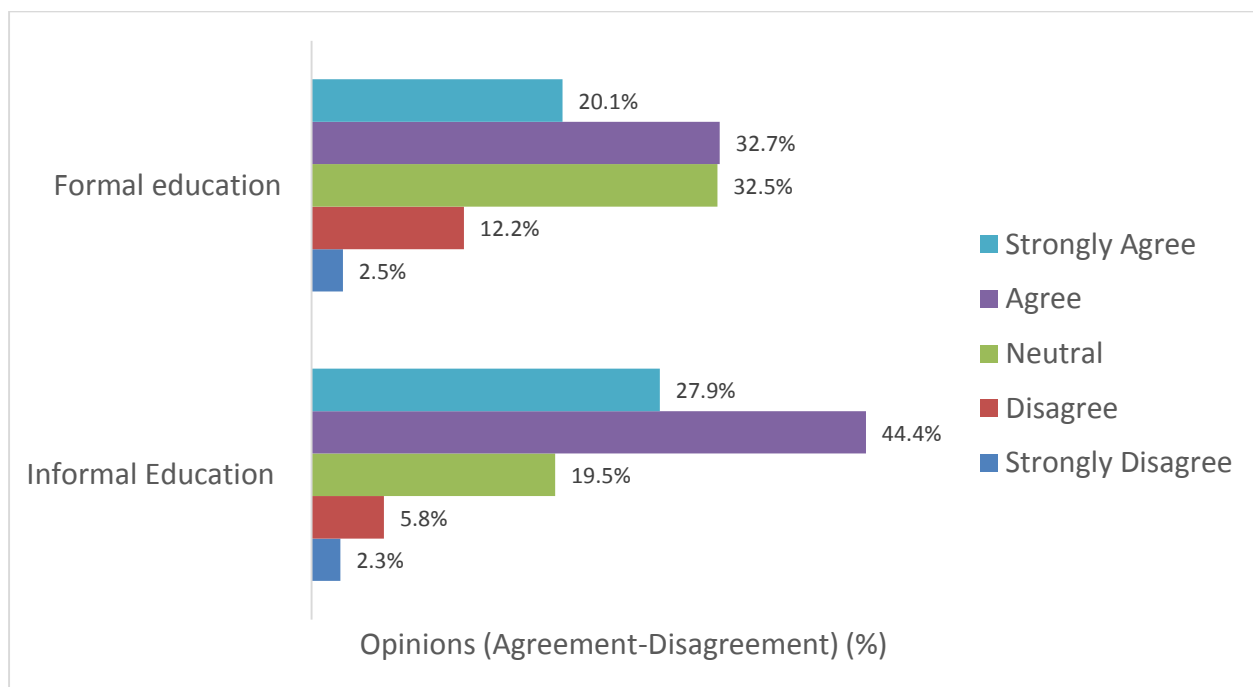


Figure 7-8. Facebook usage for promoting formal VS informal education

In total, more students approved employing Facebook in informal education (72.3%) than formal education (52.8%). It was notable that much more students showed neutral ideas for formal education (32.5%) than informal learning (19.5%), meaning that they were wavering over the pros and cons of Facebook in those two learning contexts. Moreover, the number of students protesting against

Facebook integration in formal education nearly doubled that in informal one, which was 14.7% and 8.1% respectively.

7.2.2 Drawbacks for education

Distraction

Among 394 surveyed students, 46.2% reported very often, and 31.5% claimed often distraction by other content/activities on Facebook. Losing concentration while carrying out study-related activities on Facebook was also highlighted by most interviewees.

“Users may be distracted, for example, I rarely surf the News Feed to avoid being carried away with it. But it’s common that when you are online, on the right corner of Facebook, there is always a floating bar showing who likes what, if we see people we care for, we will check out to see what they are doing. Consequently, we will get slightly inattentive and forget the tasks we need to do.” (Student B)

“I mean, at the moment, I watch them [useful posts for reference], I would really want to put it into practice. But then, if I were surfing, I would keep surfing and ended up being carried away. [...] Sometimes, communicating on Facebook is disturbed by other conversations, I mean we can have more than one conversation simultaneously.” (Student C)

The research went unexpectedly intriguing when interviewees started to reflect how they confronted Facebook distraction through their News Feed page. Specifically, student A and E intentionally avoided surfing the News Feed as much as possible. Once getting on Facebook, they tried to check out what necessary first, namely notifications, inbox, and posts from study groups so that they would not get carried away and lose focus. Others opted for customizing their News Feed to pre-filter junk posts or trivial notices.

“For other people, their News Feed usually has all posts of their Facebook friends, but for me, I have un-followed all my friends. I’ve set Facebook News Feed to show only posts from my favorite pages or presses. [...] I want posts from presses or pages that I am really keen on to be always shown on my News Feed and not get missed or mixed with friends’ posts. In case I want to know something about my friends, I will go directly to their wall [personal page].” (Student D)

“My News Feed shows what I really care about; there are just a few people whom I follow. Moreover, for example, when I am the leader of a group, I will follow all members of it, although I am not close to all of them, I want to care for them and find more topics to share when we meet in person.” (Student C)

Credibility and Authorship

The flooding flow of education-related materials or content shared relatively freely on the platform brought up constant suspicion and confusion about verification and reliability among students (40.6%), implicating the necessity of proper media education.

“Sometimes on Facebook, I see people like and share very actively, the like-and-share culture on Facebook is already so apparent, people like something and just share it as a trendy activity. They don’t think much about the accuracy, so I often get confused.” (Student B)

“I think we cannot entirely rely on those things [materials found on Facebook to self-study and improve oneself] because they are not in a particular developmental direction and the materials are overwhelmingly diverse. Also, some of them may not be useful for me, so it is important to filter out the most suitable and helpful things to adopt and follow.” (Student E)

Moreover, when questioned if they showed references/credit when using/sharing educational materials found on Facebook, 51.5% of the students reported constant awareness of indicating sources (often and very often), meaning nearly half of them paid little attention to the authorship and origin of online materials.

Miscommunicating and Low Efficiency

Another major concern stemming from the survey was the high possibility of missing updated posts or (urgent) announcements if they did not get online regularly, which consequently affected their studies negatively with 62.4% of the students encountered this problem frequently.

“I was sick and did not get online for one day only, gosh I had no idea of the news ... a bunch of notifications. I feel like now everyone is using Facebook and all of them want to use Facebook for spreading notices.” (Student B)

“The whole class is involved in the group, but as I have noticed, a post may not be seen by everyone because some members rarely use Facebook.” (Student D)

Also, the widespread application of Facebook in conducting group-work prompted particular problems with 35.6% of the participants reported to often or very often encounter misunderstanding when communicating and collaborating online with their peers.

“Usually when communicating on Facebook, we can only type, so people may misunderstand our opinions.” (Student A)

“On Facebook, people may not express all their thoughts, and we cannot see things like their body language.” (Student C)

Furthermore, detected from the interviews was unequal participation among group members which happened frequently. The indirect and asynchronous affordances of Facebook might allow members

to “hide” themselves from a meaningful contribution by ignoring group posts, engaging passively and cursorily, or simply going invisible.

“Besides the disadvantage of low interaction, in a big Facebook group, when something is posted and the leader calls for discussion, just a few members raise their opinions while the rest remain silent and “seen.” They don’t contribute much. For me, such interaction and teamwork are not what I have expected.” (Student D)

“Sometimes, group members read the posts but just forgot all about them, so I [as the group leader] needed to phone them directly to remind that the deadline was coming and asked them to upload their [assigned] parts.” (Student A)

Private and academic life

The application of Facebook in education also leads to inevitable mixing of personal and study life, provoking diverse reactions from users as presented in Figure 7-9. A large proportion of students (32.2%) felt annoyed sometimes towards such merging and 17% got highly irritated while 12.9% held an opposite opinion of feeling no discomfort at all.

“Personally, I don’t like posts which are too academic on Facebook. I think Facebook is a place for relaxing, for knowing about other people through what they write and such, and for my hobbies.” (Student A)

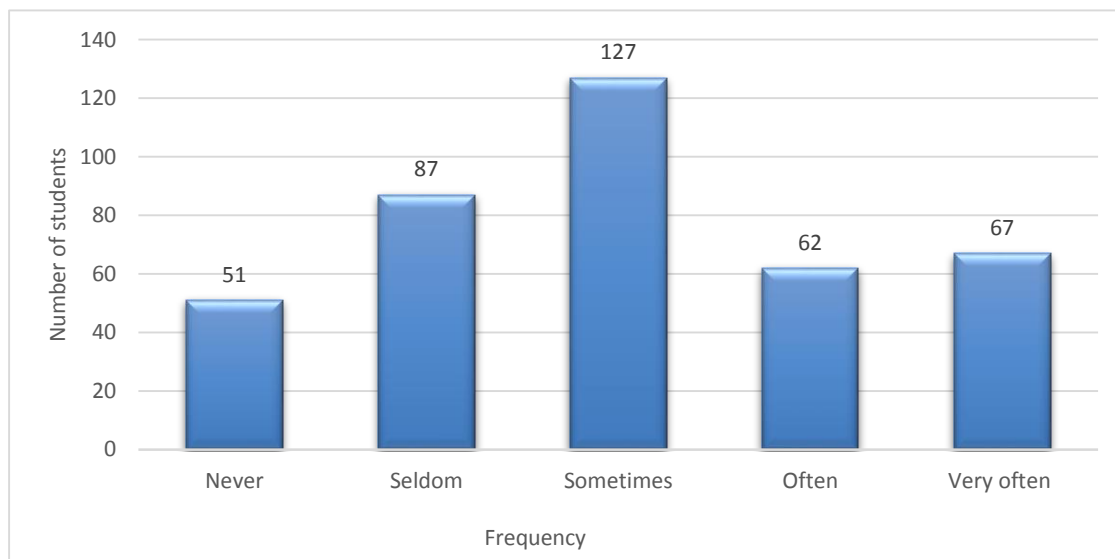


Figure 7-9. Feeling uncomfortable of mixing personal and academic life

Other minor difficulties

Open responses from surveyed students raised up additional difficulties when using Facebook for educational purposes. Key findings included technical problems (no electricity or unstable internet connection) that caused disruption while studying, unreliable academic sources found and shared on Facebook, being spammed by advertisements and irrelevant posts, and ineffective management of

information (too many posts from different groups, old and new posts mix up, and difficulty in retrieving old posts).

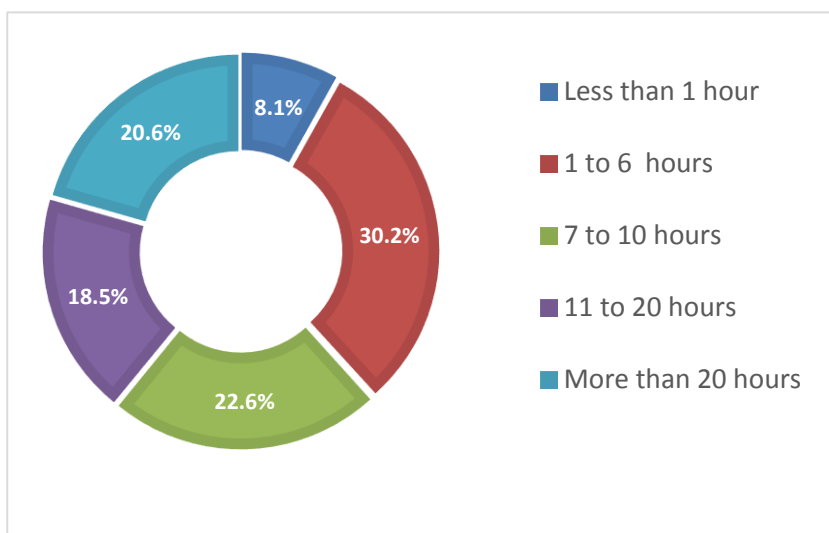
In addition, the problem of cyber-bullying was mentioned by one interviewee whose acquaintance was discriminated on Facebook by her university friends. It was reported that the victim's Facebook profile and negative rumors about her were passed around from people to people on Facebook and behind her back, which fuelled the discrimination (like the snowball effect) and led to many other consequences.

7.3 Potential for Connected Learning

The possibility of Facebook as a new medium to empower connected learning was indirectly and sometimes implicitly reflected throughout the research data of students' actual usage and their perceptions. Findings are presented under the four fundamental aspects proposed by Ito et al. (2013) in Figure 4-3: participatory culture and individual learning, access to resources and communities, social support, and marginalized users/cultures.

7.3.1 Participatory culture and individual learning

It was evident from the research data that Facebook was notably prevalent in the undergraduates' life, reflected by the massive proportion of students using the platform daily (96.2%). Also, respondents



spent ample time engaged in the platform as shown in Figure 7-10 with 61.7% spent at least 7 hours being active on Facebook per week. Notably, one-fifth of them (20.6%) admitted to spending more than 20 hours for active usage of Facebook weekly.

Along with such a strong adoption and usage were the students' preference for Facebook as the

main means of communication and their acknowledgment (87.3%) of the platform as a beneficial tool for exchanging information in university contexts (see Figure 7-11).

“Whenever I have free time, I think of Facebook, and for all the content I want to express or contacting somebody, I initially think of Facebook.” (Student C)

Also, asserted by the students was the essential role of Facebook in collaboration among group members in university, reflected through the high approval (79.4%) for Facebook considering group-working (see Figure 7-11).

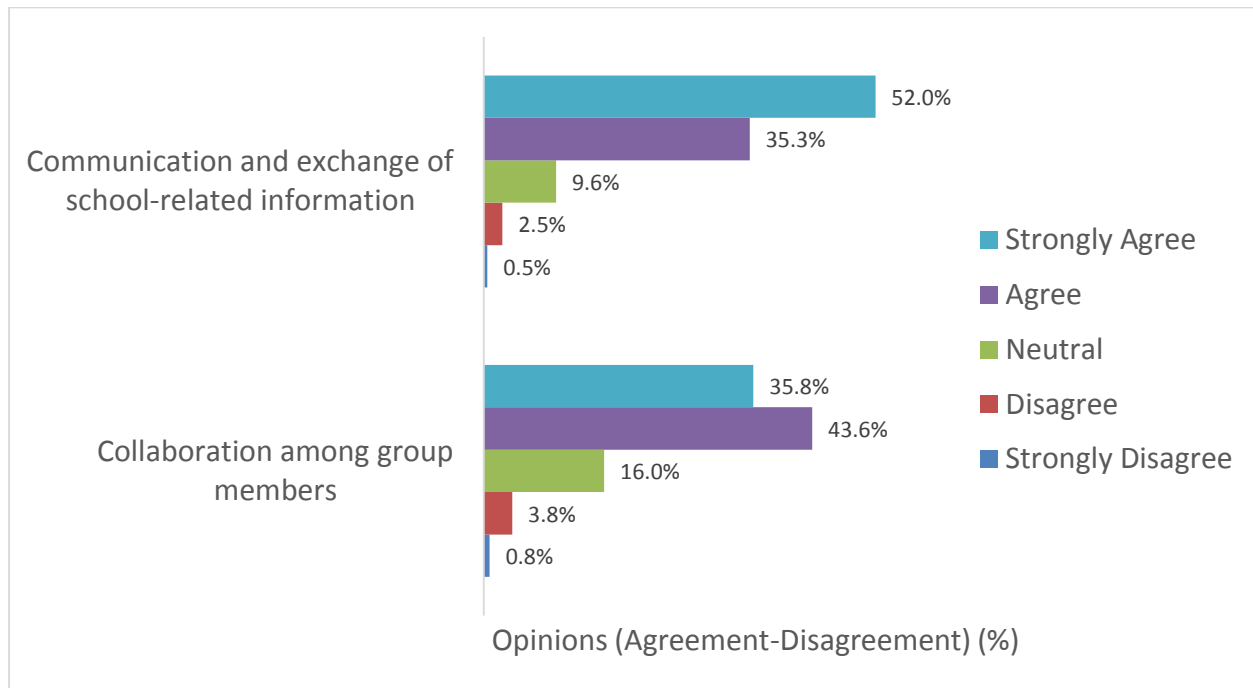


Figure 7-11. Students' acknowledgment of Facebook as an effective tool for communication and collaboration

It appeared from those findings that Facebook was fostering participating possibility, offering the students an advantageous channel for communicating beyond space and time limits, raising their voices, expressing themselves synchronously or asynchronously, being a part of bigger communities, cooperating with other members, and consequently becoming more engaged in joint movements.

Besides enhancing the participatory culture among students, Facebook simultaneously possessed enormous potential for developing individual learning. Specifically, 72.3% of surveyed students agreed that Facebook was beneficial for informal learning. Such positive attitudes implied the supportive role of Facebook in enabling its users to customize their learning path towards personal interests, learning styles and paces, and consequently develop in their self-directed ways.

“Facebook offers me various ways to learn, for example, I can learn English through songs, TV shows, or films, and many other ways.” (Student E)

“For me, Facebook is like my private bookcase or personal material archive.” (Student D)

However, two interviewees mentioned and expressed a preference for massive open online courses (MOOC) and websites designed particularly for self-learning.

“For studying, I would download materials from Facebook and self-study, that’s how I prefer. If not, I will...I sometimes take online courses on Coursera or I would join in traditional-styled classes.” (Student A)

“About self-learning, I think Youtube or self-learning websites of universities seem to be more practical than Facebook.” (Student C)

7.3.2 Access to educational resources and communities

Facebook was an essential means for delivering academic materials and resources, data for which is presented in Figure 7-12. Specifically, 70.3% of the students revealed often usage of Facebook for accessing and exchanging materials/resources while 57.9% of them frequently saved relevant materials on the platform for later use. Around four-fifths (81.7%) of the students acknowledged the supportive role of Facebook for access and sharing educational resources, especially multimedia ones which as a result, inspired them and helped diversify their learning experiences (agreed by 80.2% of the surveyed students).

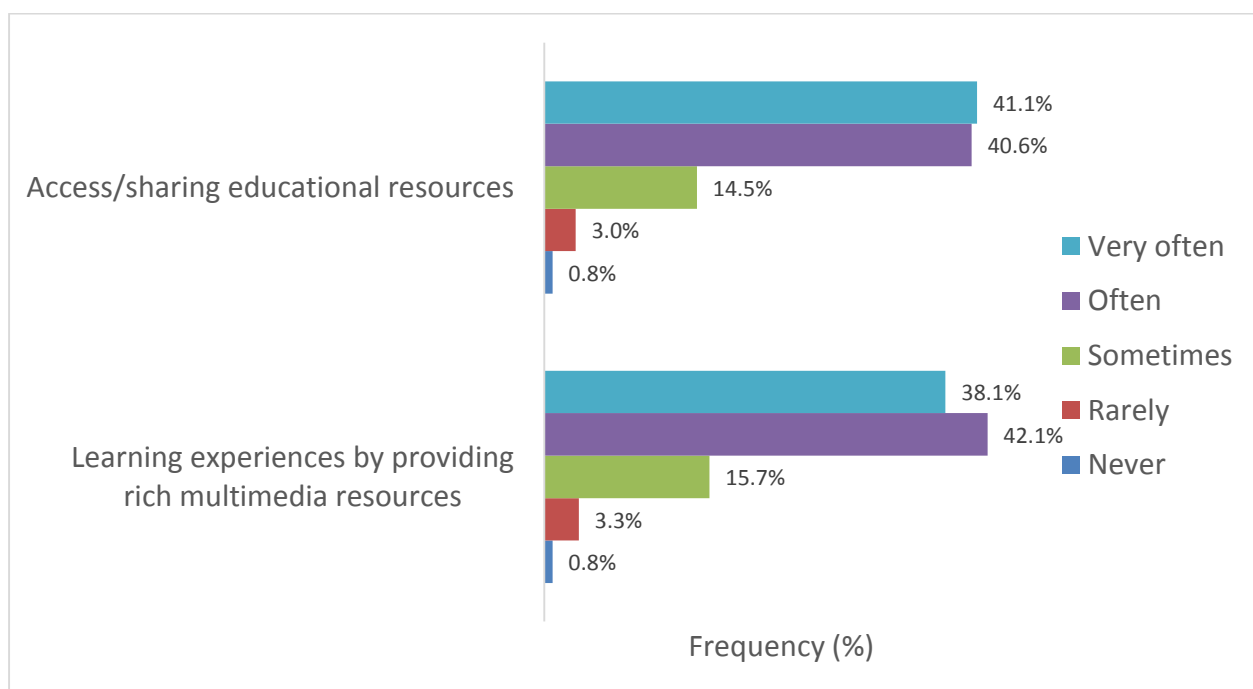


Figure 7-12. Students' acknowledgment of Facebook for access to learning materials/resources

Accessibility to communities of specialists or shared hobbies through Facebook was evidently reflected by the multiple Facebook groups/pages (both within and beyond the university) that students joined in. As revealed from the research, focuses of those groups/pages varied considerably among students (from highly academic to studies-related, professional, recreational, and spiritual), and so

did the level of interaction accompanying. However, they all shared the similarities of stemming from users' concerns, meaning that users autonomously chose the communities they would like to join in or would benefit them the most. In this way, Facebook appeared to be the bridge linking different spheres of students' life, namely academic achievements, career planning, and personal life.

7.3.3 Social connection and support

The prevalent usage of Facebook reported by the researched students indicated the vital role of Facebook in widening undergraduates' social connections both within and beyond university environment from which they found more encouragement and assistance to accomplish their studies. In particular (see Figure 7-13), nearly half of the students reported to regularly get peer-support for university assignments/projects through Facebook (43.8%) and to earn academic advice from or to share school experiences with predecessors or more experienced agents (44.5%).

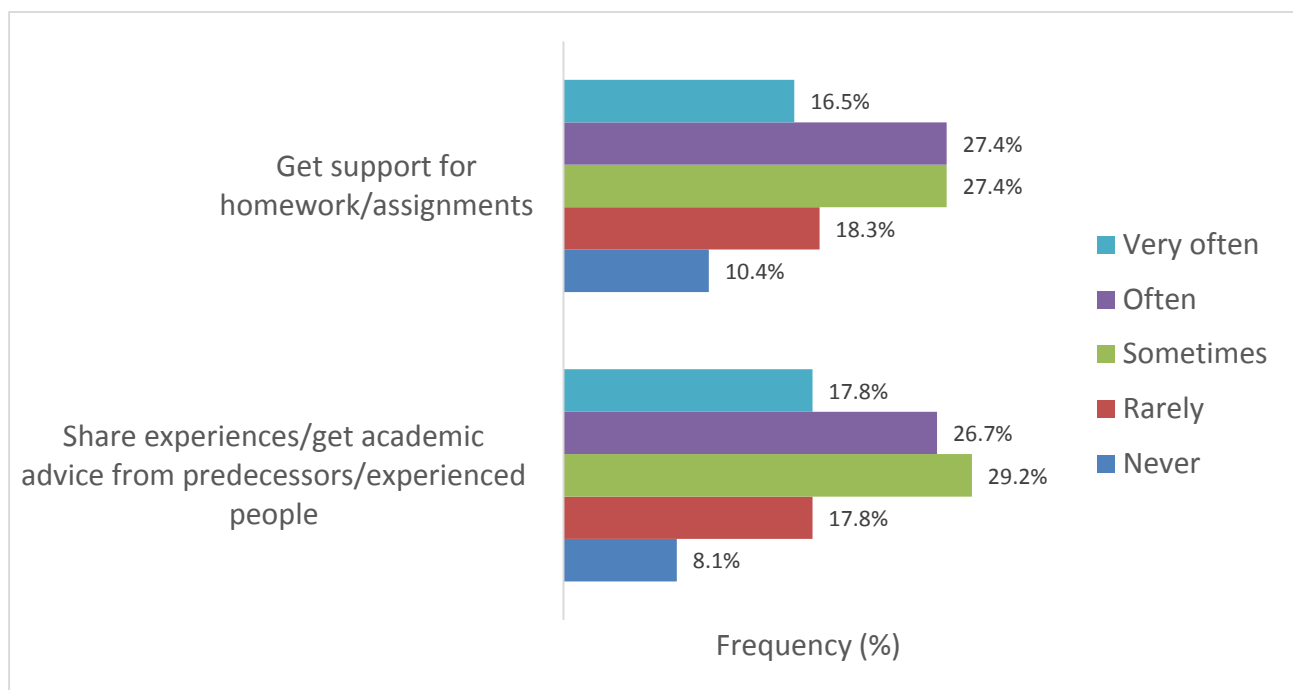


Figure 7-13. Communication on Facebook for support in studies

Besides being openly networked and getting more constructive feedback, the possibility of accessing diverse Facebook communities at users' disposal also offered the students more support in building their learning paths by keeping them informed and involved in beneficial extracurricular projects/activities (reported by 54,6% of the students). Moreover, Facebook could help pave the way for future professional development by aggregating and introducing to its users working, scholarship and further educational opportunities (reported by 54.8% of the students).

Nonetheless, stemming from the interviews were more denials (from four over five interviewees) of feeling increasingly belonging or attached to their university communities or any particular outside groups (apart from one religious group). When questioned about the connectedness among members in Facebook groups, only one out of five interviewees (Student E) claimed to feel closer and attached to her groups thanks to interaction through Facebook. She reported feeling connected as her class members usually exchanged ideas actively, supported each other, and had fun together in their Facebook group. The rest of the interviewees considered Facebook grouping as having no effects on connecting them to their larger communities due to the shallow and informing-oriented interaction and restricted communication in real life (due to the credit system of education). One of them even claimed occasional feelings of detachment as the posts in their Facebook groups might be “seen” or sometimes given a “Like” without any particular further reactions/comments from the members.

“Completely no [connectedness with other members through FB groups] because we don’t meet much in real life except for the first semester when we had to take a similar learning schedule. What they post in our group is mostly about tuition fee, learning schedule, and so on. Those are not something that can connect us.” (Student C)

Furthermore, no outstanding academic attainments or self-development through Facebook connections were reported by the five interviewees. The reasons behind such phenomena seemed to be the “shallow” interactions and available choices for “receptive communication” (in which communicators mostly received the information and did not have to react or raise specific opinions) offered by the Facebook platform.

“Usually, I follow and view the pages. I rarely interact more, maybe give it a Like. [...] When I join groups or follow pages of Arts, I see how people perform different arts, which motivates me to create similar productions of my own. It’s the same for sports; there will be short video clips of various sports which make me want to play more. It’s more about motivation, but actually, there are no significant differences ensue.” (Student C)

“Deep discussions on Facebook seem to be quite limited. As I see it, we just assign the tasks and then combine all parts.” (Student E)

7.3.4 Marginalized users/cultures

Ito et al. (2013) proposed that new media (entailing Facebook) were a supportive means towards educational equality, equity, and development as it enabled the marginalized to raise their voice actively and become more visible in collective engagement. In this research, no particular cases of

marginalized students or cultures empowered by Facebook were detected. However, emerging from the interviews was the problem of cyberbullying.

“I think it makes the discriminated student be discriminated more widely. [...] The discriminated may then have troubles to group work with other people or get a false impression from his/her teachers. And, I think, we need mutual support in our lives, so if you are kind of isolated like that, it will be difficult to survive.” (Student C)

Furthermore, Facebook was reported to fuel uneven participation and activeness in online group-working. Specifically, there were disclosed cases that certain members, despite the empowering features of Facebook for participatory culture (as mentioned in Part 7.3.1), remained relatively passive in communication, over-dependent on other active members, or even intentionally hid from interaction and contribution to the group work.

“There are some students intentionally avoid getting online to elude their responsibilities.” (Student E)

8 DISCUSSION

Based on the aforementioned students' response to online questionnaires and interviews, this chapter aims to further examine the findings in comparison with prior studies and more importantly, attempts to synthesize the research results to answer the four research questions. Therefore, in this chapter, the discussion is presented under four main themes raised in the research questions, namely, the general Facebook usage among undergraduates for education, the advantages, the disadvantages of such application, and finally, the potential of Facebook for developing connected learning in HE.

8.1 Facebook usage for educational purposes among undergraduate students

The first research question aims to examine how students at the HCMUE are using Facebook for educational purposes. Findings from the research indicate that the popularity of portable devices (such as mobiles, tablets, and laptops) helps fuel the prevalence of Facebook among the undergraduates. The students, regardless of their majors and levels of progression (based on credits earned so far), generally show a strong interest in and engagement on the Facebook platform.

About education, most of the students are actively harnessing Facebook to facilitate their studies, confirming the finding from prior research that the rapid expansion of social media, together with their affordances and merits for connecting, has triggered students' usage of Facebook for not only recreational activities but also education in diverse new ways (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Junco R. , 2015; Manasijevic et al., 2016; Thongmak, 2014). Particularly, Facebook is mainly used for study-related communication, collaboration, and sharing academic resources/materials, reconfirming the three main categories proposed by Mazman and Usluel (2010) in their Theory of Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes (see Figure 4-1).

Under a closer investigation, more notable details have been revealed. In communication, students tend to be more selective in connecting with their teachers/instructors while interacting openly with peers. Remarkably, Facebook is a common choice for spreading and accessing short-noticed announcements related to school matters, highlighting the outstanding advantage of Facebook for instant transmission of information.

Facebook interactions beyond university contexts are also commonplace, making the cyber complex of groups in which students are participating for different study-related purposes much more complicated. Their Facebook circles outside the formal learning environment can vary from occupational groups, scholarship opportunities to personal interests such as language learning, cooking, and social activities, implying the great potential of Facebook for informal learning as previously proposed by Klomsri et al. (2013).

Another significant point is that, besides employing Facebook for exchanging academic resources/materials as proposed by Mazman and Usluel (2010), the students actually access many free open sources introduced through Facebook to self-study or to archive them for future use. Apart from above major purposes, some students also use Facebook for tracking extra-curricular activities or keeping abreast of pertinent affairs that indirectly benefit their studies. This tendency resembles prior findings of Bosch (2009), Grosbeck, Bran, & Tiru (2011), and Quan-Haase & Young (2010) that Facebook can be used to keep updated of social occurrences around students' lives.

Given perceptions, most students perceive that Facebook is a useful tool for their personal studies, similar to findings of previous research by Barczyk & Duncan (2013) and Irwin et al. (2012). Generally, students' attitudes are fairly favorable toward the application of Facebook in education, especially in informal learning. However, a considerable proportion of researched students expressed neutral to negative attitudes (47.2% for formal education and 27.6 % for informal education), indicating that not all student would willingly welcome Facebook for educational purposes despite their overall active usage habits. Another interesting point is, as reported by most interviewed students, interactions within and beyond universities through Facebook rarely result in users' stronger feelings of connectedness to the target online communities although the platform is apparently favored for communication and collaboration. Such phenomena appear in congruence with the students' "emerging disconnects between the migrating habits [...] and perceptions of social media" that Mihailidis P. (2014) has found out from his survey of 873 undergraduates and follow-up discussion with eight focus groups. Evidently, most of the students spend plentiful time and rely on Facebook for many educational activities, but are likely to acknowledge less value and potential from the platform.

8.2 Advantages of Facebook usage for educational purposes

The second research question seeks to identify key benefits of applying Facebook in HE. Firstly, a prominent advantage of Facebook acknowledged by most students is facilitating communication, which is in agreement with prior research of Hamid et al. (2015), Irwin et al. (2012), and Ophus &

Abbitt (2009). Facebook, with its affordances for synchronous and asynchronous interactions, is becoming a ubiquitous channel for both undergraduate students and teachers when they need to discuss scholar topics outside classrooms or exchange logistical information (such as assignment reminders and course updates). Apparently, efficient usage of Facebook for communication can help ensure that “students stay on track”, and consequently, “enhance their performance in the course” (Joosten, 2012, p. 47).

Secondly, Facebook is valued for enhancing interpersonal collaboration and peer support among the undergraduates by offering them a user-friendly platform to get engaged in and operate group work, resembling what Manasijevic et al. (2016) and McCathy (2010) have found from their research. Specifically, through Facebook, students can exchange ideas and collaborate to accomplish common academic tasks with minimized worry about physical distance or time differences. In other words, as termed by Joosten (2012, p.10), Facebook empowers interaction “spanning temporal and spatial boundaries” among learners. However, it is noteworthy that, as many surveyed students admitted, the efficacy of online teamwork depends considerably on group members and how they agree on their working style. One reason behind may be that online collaboration usually allows participants to flexibly choose their preferred time or mode of participation, which consequently requires a higher sense of autonomy and responsibility from each team member, and a compromised approach to best accomplish the group tasks.

Thirdly, as initially aimed for promoting social networking, Facebook enables students to enlarge and educationally benefit from cyber circles beyond their cohort and university. In particular, students can widen their network to experienced or knowledgeable agents (such as predecessors or experts) to seek encouragement and constructive support to improve their expertise, which appears consistent with what Klomsri et al. (2013) have proposed. Moreover, as acknowledged by 65.2% of the researched students, Facebook users can choose, at their disposal, to engage in online groups/communities of similar majors/interests to savor a collective engagement while exposing themselves to more opportunities for academic and professional advancement.

Lastly, Facebook expedites fluid access to and exchanges of academic materials/resources within and beyond university contexts, confirming findings from the previous research of Arteaga Sánchez et al., 2014; Hung & Yuen, 2010; Irwin et al., 2012; and Ophus & Abbitt, 2009. Particularly, with the already high familiarity with Facebook, students can employ its various functionalities at ease to locate, gather, exchange, and manage their learning materials with fellow students, teachers, and other Facebook users. Furthermore, Facebook, as a social medium and information aggregator, offers a wealth of resources in various forms – videos, images, audios, news items, etc., which consequently helps enrich students’ learning experiences in conjunction with formal training

(Joosten, 2012). As importantly, through Facebook, users can also choose to access open materials/resources responding to their own interests and learning path, thus, gain more opportunities to develop informal learning space and connect it with formal one.

8.3 Drawbacks of Facebook usage for educational purposes

The third research question seeks to determine common challenges students are encountering when using Facebook for educational purposes. Firstly, the most evident disadvantage reported by many students is distraction. As initially designed for socializing and entertaining, Facebook offers far more functions than those beneficial for learning over which users scarcely have full control. Therefore, the students, while using Facebook with educational objectives in minds, easily get distracted and carried away with irrelevant contents, confirming findings from prior research of Cassidy (2006) and Wise et al. (2011). While some researched students tried to customize their Facebook accounts (such as adjusting newsfeed and notification settings) to mitigate the temptation, most other students just admitted and somehow accepted distraction as unavoidable, indicating a stern barrier for Facebook application that educators need to be aware of.

Secondly, regarding the inseparable educational and recreational affordances of Facebook, users' resistance to the convergence of personal and academic life emerges as a practical problem, conforming to the research of Wang et al. (2012). In this study, a considerable proportion of the undergraduates (around 49.2%) expressed discomfort towards such merging of Facebook usage. Although most students are using Facebook for educational activities as they choose to or are required to, the tension over invaded privacy (as expressed by mentioned students) may pose threats to their overall engagement and academic performance. Therefore, as Joosten (2012) claims in her book - "Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices", such a resistance is one major obstacle that both students and educators need to overcome to successfully harness social media for education.

Thirdly, ineffective communication and collaboration through Facebook are another radical challenge that students are confronting. As revealed from the research, undergraduate students often encounter misunderstanding in Facebook communication. This is probably because Facebook interactions are mainly text-based and usually restrict other communicative hints such as body language. However, it is interesting that students frequently communicate by texting and leaving messages in lieu of voice-calling or video-calling with their fellows for exchanging ideas. Another obstacle that hinders successful collaboration through Facebook is the unequal participation of group members. Facebook, on one hand, enables the flexibility of synchronous and asynchronous

communication suiting different users, but on the other hand, allows more space for active members to become dominant and passive members get more invisible and sluggish. Such unequal commitment may not only pull down the efficacy of group work but also cause annoyance, disappointment, and burden to certain members. Therefore, it is essential for Facebook application to be thoroughly planned and operated by both learners and educators to ensure teamwork efficacy and learning outcomes.

Fourthly, the strong capacity of Facebook for producing, sharing and circulating digitalized contents appears to be a two-edged property. While most students acknowledge the benefits from handy access to and exchanges of learning materials, they may frequently encounter confusion about the accuracy and trustworthiness of information shared through Facebook. Also, in terms of self-studying, as disclosed by interviewees of this study, students may feel lost in the Facebook repository of learning materials that demands high critical analysis for pertinent selection. For that reason, perplexing information accuracy and an overwhelmingly wide array of materials/resources available on Facebook are pressing questions that need to be considered.

Finally, using Facebook for educational purposes may be troublesome due to some occasional hindrances. Students may confront unexpected technical breakdowns over which they usually have limited control. Some other students have difficulty retrieving past posts or get annoyingly targeted by spams/irrelevant posts as the Facebook social networking site is getting commercialized swiftly. Also, confirming what Catanzaro (2011) and Willems & Bateman (2011) have proposed, Facebook can be a factor that intensifies school bullying as the victims get discriminated not only in real life but also covertly in the cyber environment.

8.4 Potential of Facebook for connected learning

The data found from this research implies that Facebook is holding great potential for developing connected learning. The platform basically satisfies the all four aspects of prospective influences of new media on connected learning as proposed by Ito et al. (2013), namely the participatory culture and self-learning, accessibility to educational knowledge and communities, social support, and diversity and empowering marginalized users (see Figure 4-3). However, under a closer investigation, the Facebook application is revealed to raise certain problems that deserve consideration.

Participatory culture and individual learning

The high rate of Facebook adoption for communication and collaboration among the HCMUE students and their overall positive attitude lead to the conclusion that Facebook is a useful tool for

amplifying participatory culture. First and foremost, as most other social media, Facebook is “characteristically open and free”, and thus, “accessible to all individuals” (Joosten, 2012, p.13), granting them more chances to keep frequent interactions with their peers and teachers. Specifically, they can choose the most convenient ways (considering time and space allowance, for instance) to raise their voices and exchange academic ideas or constructive feedback. Apparently, Facebook helps extend communication to an online dimension and widen the space for participation choice, offering users more opportunities to be engaged in their preferred ways.

However, also emerging from the research is a report on unequal participation among users, especially in group-working. A popular problem is that some members appear relatively passive compared to others as they rarely take initiatives in proceeding teamwork, remain unresponsive in group interaction or simply avoid getting involved, for which the affordance for participation freedom offered by Facebook may account. Moreover, passiveness occurs not only within student groups but also in most teacher-student interactions on Facebook. In a previous study, Facebook was believed to trigger two-way interaction, level control among users (Barczyk & Duncan, 2012), and consequently promote the roles of teachers as “facilitators of exploration, and collaboration in pursuit of answers, opportunities and solutions to problems” rather than “authoritative deliverers of knowledge” (Barczyk & Duncan, 2013, p. 1). Interestingly, findings from this research indicate other latent problems.

Firstly, just a small proportion of researched students frequently used Facebook to interact with their teachers compared to the impressive volume of interaction with friends (around 80%), indicating certain reluctance to apply Facebook in teacher-student relations. Secondly, although in Facebook groups created by the teachers for certain courses, communication between teachers and learners stands a better chance of becoming two-way, teachers still seem to hold the dominant roles. As disclosed by most interviewees, those Facebook groups are mainly used for teachers to distribute materials, spread notices or better administrate the learners rather than offering the students an open space for raising ideas and generating their own meaningful knowledge.

In terms of individual learning, regardless of Facebook groups/activities that students are required to participate in for the sake of formal learning, they can choose to engage in other online groups/activities suiting their personal learning path or piquing their own interests. Therefore, it can be concluded that Facebook offers learning opportunities that “respect students’ diverse talents and ways of learning” (Joosten, 2012, p. 51), which consequently amplifies users’ self-directed development. Nevertheless, regarding the disadvantages that users usually encounter while using Facebook for learning, especially distraction, it is worth considering that some students may have preference over MOOC and new media designed particularly for self-learning.

Access to educational resources and communities

In congruence to previous research, users' accessibility to knowledge is another prominent benefit of Facebook usage (see Part 8.2). Facebook is acknowledged for not only easing exchanges of learning materials/resources among students and teachers but also widening users' access to abundant further knowledge repositories/communities of their interests or personal development orientations.

Social connection and support

As primarily designed for enhancing social networking, Facebook can be a beneficial tool for mobilizing social support which is indispensable for connected learning to occur (Ito, et al., 2013). Through Facebook, such collective power comes not only from university agents like classmates, teachers, and predecessors but also ones beyond university contexts that Facebook users choose to connect with. The widened social network, besides enabling the students to gain more objective feedback from shared-interest agents, provides them with more practical opportunities to put knowledge into practice and develop their career in reality.

Nevertheless, social connection through Facebook appears to be dramatically widened, but poorly deepened. Despite frequent interactions on Facebook, most interviewed students felt no improved connectedness to their class/course group or online communities which they were parts of. Some students even reported annoyance due to irresponsible and passive members who failed to fulfill their group tasks. While the sense of connectedness and active construction from all members are considered key components of a successful classroom community (Rovai, 2002), these reported problems apparently hinder beneficial impacts of Facebook grouping on learning outcomes. Furthermore, outside the university environment, social support from other Facebook interactions/communities seem to be relatively shallow. In particular, as admitted by most interviewees, student users are roughly passive information receivers or followers of Facebook communities/pages while meaningful deep interactions with knowledgeable agents and strong commitment are scarce, leading to very few outstanding academic/professional achievements thanks to social support through Facebook.

Marginalized users/cultures

In advocacy of educational equality and equity, the connected learning theory (Ito, et al., 2013) places much emphasis on the fortifying role of new media for disempowered users/cultures to become more visible and active. As Facebook is promoting the participatory culture among undergraduates, marginalized individuals are more likely to have their voice heard, engage in group activities and actively tailor learning to personal needs as long as they afford a proper device and the Internet. Also, students who are relatively introverted may regard Facebook as a viable alternative to direct meetings/discussions which can be frightening to them (Moore & McElroy, 2012).

On the other hand, Facebook application in education seems to tolerate passive individuals to a certain extent by allowing them to delay, avoid, or even hide from online interactions. Such inactiveness not only gives rise to unequal learning engagement but may also fuel sluggish users and make them somehow invisible and excluded from the community. Another noteworthy issue stemming from the research is cyber-bullying. The reported “victim” was deliberately isolated and deprecated by her peers through Facebook interactions, which not only diminished her participatory and contributory possibility but also marginalized her in the university community. Apparently, social media like Facebook can escalate bullying beyond the usual physical environment to the cyber world, confirming prior findings of Catanzaro (2011) and Willems & Bateman (2011).

All in all, it is evident from the research findings that Facebook is empowering disadvantaged and minor students by granting them more opportunities for active participation and commitment to the community, proving what has been proposed by Ito et al. (2013) about the prospects of new media for connected learning. Nevertheless, deliberate passive participation and cyber-bullying are emerging problems of Facebook usage, which may fuel marginalization among student users and, consequently, widen the gaps to reach educational equity and equality.

9 CONCLUSION

9.1 Educational implications

Firstly, although Facebook is not always used as an official learning tool in universities, undergraduate students are actually using them for a wide array of educational purposes, particularly communication, collaboration, and accessing/sharing academic materials. The already prevalence of Facebook and the undergraduates' generally positive attitude indicate the great potential of capitalizing on Facebook in HE that is worth educators' attention. Moreover, understanding students' usage habits, the pros, and cons of Facebook may serve as a solid foundation for teachers to make "strategically planned" (Joosten, 2012, p. 39) integration of this platform. Specifically, teachers can better harness Facebook as a course supplement by considering thoroughly how to match specific educational tasks/activities, particular functionalities of Facebook, and outcome expectation (Joosten, 2012) to ensure pertinent application and optimal efficacy in their teaching-learning contexts.

Secondly, the aforementioned challenges of Facebook use in HE signal the need for better media education which can be integrated into each course or offered as an independent training unit. For instance, the students' confusion over information accuracy on Facebook could be mitigated if they were properly trained how to verify online resources and got oriented towards reliable sources for references in advance. Also, the problem of being overwhelmed by excessive learning materials shared through Facebook could be overcome by frequent professional consultation on each student's self-studying path. In addition, the students would stand a better chance of dealing with the low efficacy of Facebook communication and collaboration, distraction and cyber-bullying if they received regular guidance on self-regulatory skills or proper conducts on social media regarding both academic progress and harmonious socializing. Taking into account the downsides as well as the necessity of media education, teachers in HE can be more proactive in predicting and assisting their students to surmount learning hindrances.

Thirdly, teachers should be mindful that there is a tendency among students to devalue Facebook for education despite their actual high usage and some may suffer tension towards fusing personal life and academic activities on Facebook. Although, because of the course requirements or

peer pressure, students appear to use the site actively for learning, some may feel uncomfortable or hold invisible resistance to such integration, which can subsequently discourage their engagement and impact learning outcomes negatively. Therefore, instead of planning and imposing the site on learners' studies, teachers can ask the students to vote for the decision on Facebook use as they will be the main beneficiaries of such an integration. Moreover, teachers should give them opportunities to raise their opinions, based on which teachers can offer orientation to make the students more prepared and willing for later Facebook application if applicable. The orientation content can be tailored to suit specific learners, but as Joosten (2012) recommends, it may basically cover reasons why the social medium is adopted, what attainments it can facilitate, and students' expected conduct when using the new tool.

Finally, regarding the systematical rigidity and void between formal HE and practicality, for which the Vietnamese case is an example, connected learning fostered by social media can be part of the solution. Examining the mere case of Facebook, this study shows that the site possesses certain advantageous affordances for self-advancing, collective support, and reality orientation while appears rather limited for deep interaction, community connectedness, distinguished academic achievements, and enhancing educational equality. Therefore, Facebook may be a choice for promoting connected learning, but it is recommended that educators should ponder about combining it with other social media such as MOOC platforms for optimal achievements.

9.2 Research implications

This research has spotlighted the general use of Facebook for educational purposes in HE. Future studies can focus on Facebook usage patterns among genders, learning progress, and major disciplines to gain more insights into the subjects and discern potential discrepancies.

Facebook usage as an instructional supplement in specific courses and the impacts of integrating Facebook on particular competencies or learning outcomes are also worth further investigation.

Moreover, the five interviews in this research revealed certain issues that were absent from the questionnaire, namely cyber-bullying and community connectedness through Facebook. However, due to such a small size of interviewees, it is recommended that future researchers conduct more large-scaled empirical studies on these latent variables for deeper exploration.

Last but not least, as teachers play a decisive role in the teaching-learning process, it is of paramount importance to examine how teachers perceive and actually use Facebook in their professional practices, and the correlation between such teachers' engagement with learners'

response, and consequently, with learning outcomes. Understanding both learners and teachers may pave the way to a critical and efficient application of new technologies in education.

9.3 Reliability and validity of the research

This thesis aims to explore the Vietnamese undergraduates' Facebook usage for academic purposes and prospective impacts of such integration on HE, through which useful implications for education and research can be drawn out. These targets have been basically attained through answering the four research questions focusing on students' usage habits, advantages, disadvantages, and potential of Facebook application for promoting connected learning in HE. The mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approach was applied for optimal measurement of those intended subjects. The measuring instruments, which were questionnaires and interviews, were designed based on relevant prior research and went through several trials with specialists and students to be validated. Also, the survey was semi-structured, allowing appropriate flexibility to students' diverse experiences and attitudes. In the end, while the quantitative data provided a descriptive overview of the target subjects, findings from theme-based content analysis of the qualitative data offered a deeper investigation into the research matters. As a result, those supplemental findings helped set a firm ground for this research to conduct later discussion and evaluation of Facebook integration in HE contexts.

However, the research bears certain limitations that may pose threats to its validity and reliability. The first limitation lies in the application of semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. In particular, although Facebook users are aware and capable of reflecting on their usage, what they divulge may be prone to self-reporting bias. In other words, the figures, patterns, and opinions collected through questionnaires and interviews are more likely to be self-inflated and inconsistent. Furthermore, as collecting data of this research was conducted online, it is more challenging to ensure respondents' concentration, commitment, and reflection while participating in the survey.

Secondly, the research sample is rather limited. Specifically, it covered solely the students from HCMUE – one public pedagogical university in the vibrant Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The surveyed students also distributed unevenly among genders (about three-fourths of them were female) and major clusters (students from Languages cluster were dominant with 41.9%). Moreover, the number of interviews were relatively small (5 interviews) with no senior students or participants of Social Sciences majors. Due to such confined scope and uneven distribution, the research is more likely to lack deeper exploration while missing certain phenomena, which may subsequently affect its validity and possibility of generalizing the research results.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF FACEBOOK FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

Greetings!

I am Nguyen Thi Thanh Thao – Lecturer of Faculty of English Language, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam, and Master student of Media Education, Faculty of Education, University of Tampere, Finland. At present, I am conducting research on undergraduate students' use of Facebook social networking site for educational purposes. Therefore, I hope that you can spend 10 minutes to join in this survey which covers the following points:

- Personal information
- Usage of Facebook social networking site
- Problems of using Facebook for educational purposes
- Perceptions of Facebook application in HE

The data collected from this survey will be used anonymously and only for research aims. Further comments and feedback are welcomed and can be sent to my email – thanhthao29@gmail.com.

I hope to have your participation and sincerely thank you for your attention.

Notice: In this questionnaire, **Facebook usage** entails all integral structures and features of Facebook social networking platform, namely News Feed, Groups, Timeline, Facebook Messenger, Multimedia Capacity (Photo, Audio, Live Streaming), Sharing, Comments and Reactions, Tagging, Bookmarking and so forth.

I> RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

1. Which age group do you belong to:

- a. 18-24 b. 25-34 c. 35-44

2. Your gender is:

- a. male b. female

3. Which of the following cluster does your major belongs to:

- a. Natural Sciences (Faculty of Mathematics - Informatics, Chemistry, Physics, Information Technology, and Biology)
- b. Social Sciences (Faculty of Literature, Geography, Political Education, and History)
- c. Foreign Languages (Faculty of English Language, Chinese Language, French Language, Russian Language, Japanese Language, and Korean Language)
- d. Specific Education (Faculty of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Physical Education, National Defense Education, Special Education, Psychology, Education Science)

4. How many credits (of your existing undergraduate program) have you earned so far?

- a. under 30 ECTs
- b. from 30 to 60 ECTs
- c. from 60 to 90 ECTs
- d. over 90 ECTs

II> GENERAL FACEBOOK USAGE PATTERNS

1. Which device do you use to get access to Facebook? (You can choose more than 1 option)

- a. Desktop
- b. Laptop
- c. Tablet
- d. Smartphone
- e. Other

2. Are you friends (connected) with your university-mate(s) on Facebook?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3. Are you friends (connected) with your lecturer(s) on Facebook?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4. How often do you use Facebook in general?

- a. Daily/almost daily
- b. Weekly/almost weekly
- c. Few times a month
- d. Few times a year

5. How much time per week do you averagely spend being active on Facebook?

- a. Less than 1 hour
- b. 1 to 6 hours
- c. 7 to 10 hours
- d. 11 to 20 hours
- e. More than 20 hours

III> ACTUAL USAGE OF FACEBOOK FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

Choose the level that best suits your way of using Facebook.

(1-Never, 2- Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Often, 5- Very often) (the frequency of using Facebook to realize your goal-directed activities)

- 1. I use Facebook to communicate with my university mates about school-related topics.
- 2. I use Facebook to contact my lecturers about school-related topics and/or for study counseling.

3. Through communication on Facebook, I get/confirm school logistical information (such as learning schedule, dates for course registration, exam dates, etc.).
4. I get informed of at-short-notice announcements regarding courses, classes, or school issues by using Facebook.
5. I use Facebook to get support from Facebook community for my homework/assignments (for example by asking for comments/advice or conducting surveys for research)
6. I use Facebook to contact predecessors/experienced people for sharing school experiences or asking for academic advice.
7. I use Facebook to facilitate group tasks/projects of my study (to set up group-working space and interact with each other)
8. Through Facebook, I get to know and join in beyond-university projects/activities that are related to or would benefit my studies at school.
9. Apart from Facebook groups for study in university, I join other Facebook groups/communities of similar academic focuses/interests for self-studying and improvement.
10. I join beyond-university Facebook groups/communities to search for information on HE or prospective major-related jobs.
11. I get access to/share academic resources or learning materials through Facebook (such as course handouts, reference materials, self-study materials, etc.)
12. I use Facebook to bookmark/save relevant/useful resources for my studies.
13. In any other ways do you use Facebook to benefit your educational experience? Please specify the usage and its frequency (For example Activity A – Often)
-

IV> PERCEPTION ON USE OF FACEBOOK FOR EDU PURPOSES (5-SCALE LIKERT)

Choose the level that best expresses your opinions for the following statements (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly agree.)

1. Facebook is an effective tool supporting communication and exchange of school-related information.
2. Facebook is highly useful in doing group work and promoting collaboration among and group members.
3. Facebook enables and enhances collaboration beyond school community for academic and professional development.
4. Facebook is an effective tool for accessing and sharing educational resources/materials.

5. Facebook assists users in accessing and sharing rich multimedia resources easily, which helps improve the learning experience.

(Multimedia: The use of text, graphics, animation, pictures, video, and sound to present information.)

6. Using Facebook is beneficial for my personal learning experience.

7. Facebook can serve as an effective tool to assist formal learning (spanning from primary level to HE.)

8. Facebook can be used as an effective means to assist informal learning (learning that is driven by personal interests/needs through daily experiences or interaction with other people/resources.)

V> PROBLEMS THEY CONFRONT WHEN USING FACEBOOK FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES:

Choose the most appropriate frequency of the following occurrences: (1-Never, 2- Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Often, 5- Very often)

1. While using Facebook for educational purposes, I am easily distracted by other Facebook contents/activities.

2. I miss updated posts or (urgent) announcements if I do not get online on Facebook regularly, which consequently affect my studies.

3. I encounter misunderstanding while communicating or group-working by using the Facebook platform.

4. I feel suspicious/confused about the verification of education-related resources/materials found/shared on Facebook.

5. I give attention to showing references/credit when using/sharing educational materials found on Facebook.

6. I feel uncomfortable/annoyed when mixing my personal life and academic life on Facebook.

7. While using Facebook for educational purposes, do you encounter any other problems? If yes, please specify the problem and its frequency of occurrence (For example Problem X – Often).

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Would you be kindly willing for an online interview for further clarification of your Facebook usage? (All information collected is anonymous and used for research purposes only). If yes, please leave YOUR NAME and EMAIL below (For example Thao Nguyen – thaonguyen@gmail.com).

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Thank you very much for your participation!